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THE HOME RULE OF ELIZA

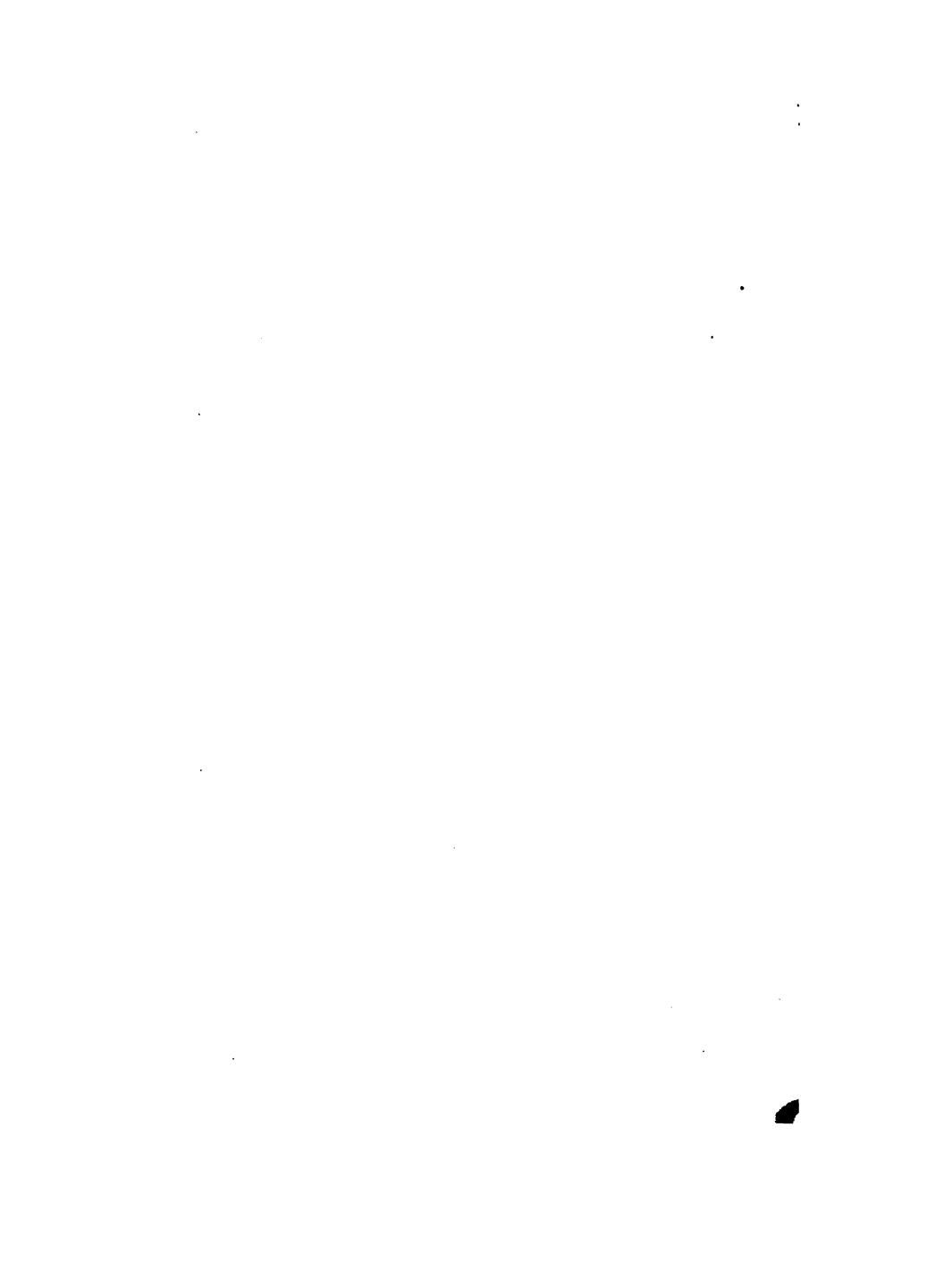


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THE HOME RULE OF ELIZA

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"Good mornin', everybody," she said
pleasantly.

THE
HOME RULE OF ELIZA

BY
FREDERICK W. BECKER

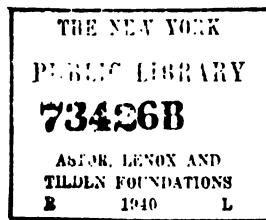
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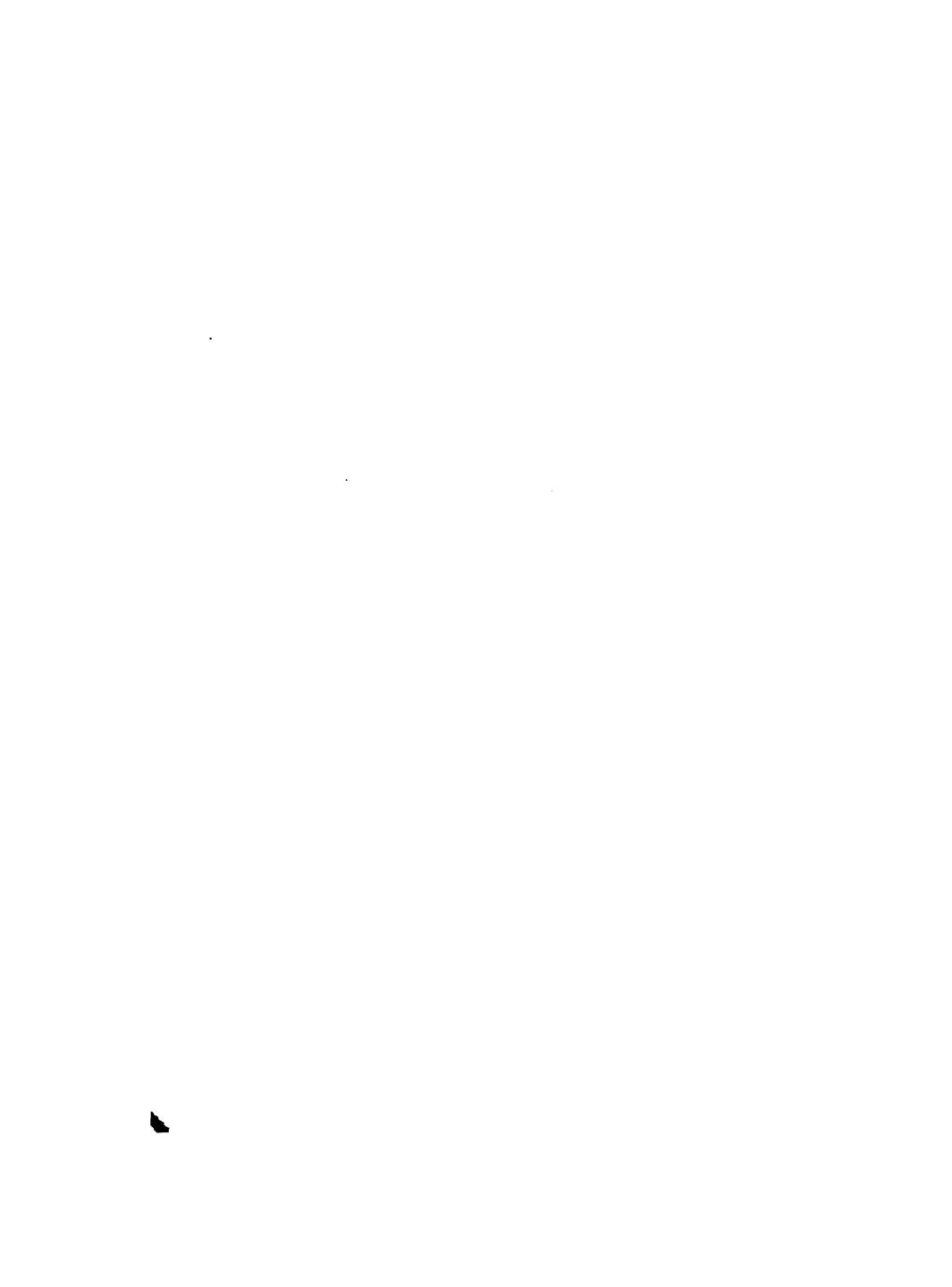


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THE HOME RULE OF ELIZA

THE HOME RULE OF ELIZA

CHAPTER I

THE APPOINTMENT

“THE gentlemen will please come to order!” exclaimed Chairman Lindsley, thumping the table with his corn-cob pipe. “Secretary Darby, call the roll!”

“Ephraim Lindsley?”

“Here!”

“Amzi Messler?”

“Here!”

“Hiram Pierson?”

“Here!”

“Samuel Canfield?”

“No—er—present!”

“Abner Darby votes here!”

“There bein’ a quorum present, I

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declare the Hoss Hill township committee meetin' open fer business in due and ancient form," said the chairman, giving the table three hard raps with the aforementioned gavel.

When the committee had finished its routine work, Secretary Darby arose to remind the members of the necessity of filling the vacancy caused by the death of Ann Gulick, the late matron of the Almshouse.

"Mr. Chairman," said Hiram Pier-
son, taking the floor, "we have re-
ceived a petition signed by nigh onto
all the taxpayers in Hoss Hill Town-
ship, askin' us to appint 'Liza Mor-
gan as new matron. You all know
Dave Morgan's goin' to the Soldiers'
Home the end of this week. From all
I kin learn Dave's jest about on his
last legs and can't last much longer—"

"What's the matter with him, Hi?"

The Appointment

interrupted the secretary looking up from his minute book.

“Doc Beers says it’s ‘Ferocious of the Liver’ with a complication of diseases,” replied Hiram Pierson, glancing around proudly, for he was the first Horse Hiller who had dared to tackle the term “Cirrhosis.”

“What in thunder be that?” queried the secretary.

“Don’t know, Abner, only what Doc says—he says Dave’s liver is growed hard-like and full of hob-nails.”

“I always allowed Dave’d git some-thin’ or other out of the ordinary from drinkin’ so much of Hank Tagger’s biled apple-juice,” remarked the chairman. “I kept tellin’ him he was only drivin’ nails into his coffin with every spree, but I never imagined he’d be drivin’ hob-nails into his liver.”

“You’re right, Eph. I guess we all

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warned him times enough," said Samuel Canfield, in his hard dry voice. "Leastwise, I did."

"Well, if Dave goes to the Home he kin only drink up his pension and not any of the double-widder's earnin's," replied Amzi Messler, removing a piece of succulent timothy from his mouth.

"Dave and Abel are the only two survivors of them what enlisted out of our township, ain't they, Abner?" queried Samuel Canfield.

"I guess they be, Sam," replied the dapper secretary, withdrawing the pen from above his ear. And after scratching his head with the end of the holder, he counted off on his fingers, "There was Abel Gulick, Dave Morgan, Ben Losee, and Bill Cole."

"All of 'em volunteers, too," reminded Hiram Pierson.

"Come, come, gentlemen! Let's

The Appointment

talk to the pint. What's your pleasure with the question of a new matron?" the chairman exclaimed, tapping the table with his pipe.

Commissioner Messler slowly arose and removed the now shortened bit of hay from his mouth, and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Chairman," he said in measured tones, "I move that 'Liza Morgan be appointed matron of the Hoss Hill Poorhouse at a salary of fifty-two dollars per annum and keepin's fer a term of one year, the same to date from the fust of the month."

"I second that motion, Mr. Chairman," remarked Commissioner Pier-
son, half rising in his seat and then settling comfortably back again.

"Gentlemen, you have heard the motion. Are there any objections?"

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“Mr. Chairman, I object to the motion,” exclaimed Commissioner Canfield, quickly getting upon his feet and looking aggressively at the other members. “As a humble servant of the people of Hoss Hill Township, and a steward of their public funds, I feel it’s my duty to watch carefully over all the expenditures of this board. The tax rate riz last year one and a quarter pints and we can’t afford no more fancy salaries. I move an amendment to the motion that the salary be fifty dollars a year and keepin’s.”

The self-appointed watch-dog of the public treasury glared about him again and sat down.

“You might have knowed that Sam would kick,” Amzi Messler whispered to the secretary.

Abner merely winked.



"I declare 'Liza Morgan duly elected matron
of Hoss Hill Poorhouse."

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The Appointment

After considerable wrangling this momentous question was finally compromised and the committee unanimously voted to make the salary fifty-one dollars per year.

“As the chairman of this committee I now declare ‘Liza Morgan duly elected matron of the Hoss Hill Poorhouse,’” decided Chairman Lindsley with a whack of his gavel. “Mr. Secretary, will you go out and see if you kin find ‘Liza and ask her to some right up and sign the contract?’”

“Dave’s goin’ past now, Eph. I’ll tell him to send her in,” replied the secretary. Hastening to the window he told the news to the newly elected matron’s husband.

In due time Mrs. Morgan arrived and was ushered into the presence of the august body of commissioners.

Running his hand through his shock

The Home Rule of Eliza

of blond hair, the chairman addressed the fortunate appointee.

“ ‘Liza Morgan,’ ” he began, “ it’s my pleasure and privilege to inform you that you have been unanimously elected matron of the Hoss Hill Poor-house fer one year, you to take holt next Monday mornin’ at a yearly salary of fifty-two—”

“ No, sir, it was fifty-one dollars! ” shouted Commissioner Canfield, springing to his feet and pounding a gnarled fist into the palm of his left hand.

“ You’re right, Sam—at a yearly salary of fifty-one dollars and keepin’ s. Do you accept the honorable position and trust? ”

“ Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, with thanks to you all. As long as I am there I shall do my best to build up the place— ” but Mrs. Morgan did not finish. Commissioner

The Appointment

Canfield again sprang up and interrupted her.

“Mr. Chairman, I said afore that we have to practice economy. I want to impress it on the mind of Mrs. Morgan that she needn’t be in too much of a hurry to build up the Poorhouse. It’s built up jest about enough already and don’t need no more cupolas. Besides, I want to tell her that she’ll keep them brats in the future jest as they’ve been kept in the past. And so’s she won’t have no excuse fer not knowin’, I’ll jest tell her this,” he continued, shaking his finger violently; “milk and sugar fer the trash Sunday mornin’s only. The rest of the week they git tea straight and not over strong at that. Of course,” and this he remarked in a condescending tone, “you and Abel kin have all you actually need fer your own table, and like-

The Home Rule of Eliza

wise with the butter. Remember, 'Liza Morgan, on the Lord's day only fer them. The correct way to learn sech paupers to honor their Maker is by givin' them a leetle extry once in awhile to show 'em how the Lord provides fer them out of His bounty. And another word, 'Liza. You'll please remember that you have a husband at the Soldiers' Home when you git to the Poorhouse, and that Abel Gulick be a widderer. That's all," and Sam Canfield sat down with a self-satisfied expression upon his smooth-shaven face, feeling that he had saved the township from both bankruptcy and a possible scandal.

There was an interval of oppressive silence following Canfield's remarks. No one seemed to know just what to do. The members of the board, clearly embarrassed and ill at ease, merely

The Appointment

looked at Mrs. Morgan who stood quite still.

Finally Eph Lindsley broke the suspense.

“ ‘Liza,’ he said, “will you please step up to the table and sign the contract?—Yes, right there.”

The newly appointed matron took the pen proffered her by the secretary.

“Your full name,” continued the chairman kindly, “E-liza. That’s right. Now you be the legally appointed matron of the Poorhouse and you will take holt next Monday mornin’, rain or shine. Good luck to you, ‘Liza.”

“Thank you, Eph Lindsley,” exclaimed the new matron, grasping the extended hand of the big, bluff chairman, “but afore I go I want to say one word to Sam Canfield. As long as I be matron of the Poorhouse and I

The Home Rule of Eliza

don't go beyond the regular monthly sum sot apart fer to run it with, I'm goin' to run it to suit myself—fer there's your contract and you can't go back on that, leastwise, not fer one year. And if I kin economise on things that ain't necessary and see fit to spend the savin's on things that be necessary, I'm goin' to do it. I'm goin' to have milk and sugar and butter and sech things on the chil-dern's table every day or else they don't go on ounr either. Their leetle stomachs crave sech things jest as much as yourn.

“Furthermore, if any of them chil-dern gits the summer complaint be-cause of the poor milk you send—tain't bad enough fer you to send 'em skim milk, but it's got to be loppered—then I'm goin' to git better milk. If that ain't enough I'll go to town and buy a

The Appointment

fertilizer,"—Mrs. Morgan had lately read a leaflet dilating upon the advantages of sterilizing milk,—“and I'll fertilize the milk fer 'em, especially as dog-days will soon be here. I tell you it makes one's heart bleed to see how some of them poor, leetle orphans languish and die all because you are too—too—bless my patch—too—too—

“Jest one word more, Sam Canfield. The fust thing I'll buy will be an iron mud-scraper, and the second will be a door mat. And every last man of you what crosses the Poorhouse thrash-old'll go over with clean boots, clean hearts and clean thoughts, or,” motioning with her hands, “out you go! Good day!” The overwrought and indignant matron of the Horse Hill Almshouse turned about and marched out of the door, slamming it shut with a bang.

The Home Rule of Eliza

The members of the township committee looked at each other in dismay and then with one accord they turned to Canfield. He stood speechless with rage at the new matron's audacity.

"By Judas!" he sputtered at length, "nobody ever talked to me like that afore, and I won't stand fer it. I'll—"

Eph Lindsley's calm voice interrupted him.

"That's all right, Sam," he said. "'Liza weren't aimin' to be fractious. You jest wait till she takes holt next Monday and see if things don't go along all right. As there ain't no more business, I declare this meetin' adjourned," he concluded, before the Deacon could retort.

CHAPTER II

'LIZA TAKES HOLT

ON the Friday following the meeting of the Township Committee, Comrade Morgan, husband of the newly elected matron of the Alms-house, found himself surrounded by his friends and cronies at Finnegin's Inn. He was bidding them farewell, and after numerous "Here's to seein' you agin!" he boarded a noon train. Before dark he was comfortably "campin'" at the Soldiers' Home.

A few days later—on Monday morning to be exact—Eliza Morgan entered upon her duties at the poorfarm. Long before five o'clock on this momentous day, however, Abel Gulick and his wards were up, feverishly awaiting

The Home Rule of Eliza

the arrival of the much-discussed and greatly feared matron. Up and down the porch marched the spare superintendent, his peg-leg ker-thumping at every step. His mustache and goatee were freshly trimmed, his cap was set at the correct angle and the brass buttons of his blue uniform were brightly polished.

At the slightest sound from down the road, a chorus of "there she comes!" arose from the inmates clustered about the steps. After many false alarms the children straggled down the path and out of the yard, eager to catch the earliest possible glimpse of the object of their dread. At last the vigils of the watchers were rewarded.

"There she comes!" went up in one grand shout. Sure enough. There came sturdy Mrs. Morgan around the

'Liza Takes Holt

bend in the road, her red calico dress and green apron flapping in the early morning breeze, and in her arms an immense rubber-plant that overtopped her blue sun-bonnet. With a wild scamper of bare feet and a cloud of dust thirteen children stood drawn up on the porch with Sergeant Abel Gullick in command.

With precise and measured strides the perspiring but smiling Mrs. Morgan marched up the unkept path to the house.

"Good mornin', everybody," she said pleasantly.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Morgan!" cried the orphans in unison and then, abashed, hung their heads, watching her stealthily the while from the corners of their eyes.

"Good mornin', 'Liza," said the sergeant, saluting her in formal military

The Home Rule of Eliza

fashion. "Ain't you rather early?"

"Kind of later than I allowed to be, Abel. I expected to be here a good spell ago but in packin' up my belongin's Saturday, I overlooked 'George Washington,' 'The Last Supper,' 'Abe Lincoln,' and 'The Battle of Gettysburg' on the wall. Then I fergot Ben's and Bill's discharges hangin' by the chimbley piece—Dave, he took hisn to the Home Friday—I've only got Ben's and Bill's left—but I kept the three flags what I useter keep stickin' up over the three of 'em and if you have your discharge hangin' up you kin stick Dave's flag over yourn. I was afeerd the glasses'd git broke if I left 'em loose-like around the house, and so I had to undo the bed quilts agin and tie the pictures and the discharges up between my quilts and the patch-work comf'tible me and your Ann

'Liza Takes Holt

made about nineteen year ago. Lemme see, yep, it was jest nineteen years ago this comin' winter, Abel. I remember it was the time when our brindle cow—we had a cow in them days—got holler-horn, and Bill—I were Mrs. Bill Cole then—nope, Abel, nope, it was Ben—I were Mrs. Ben Losee—it was jest afore poor Ben died, and I always allowed it had somethin' to do with his takin' off. Well, Ben—yep, it were Ben—Ben he fell in Amzi Messler's cistern when he went to borry a gimlet fer to bore a hole in the cow's horn with and to borry some turpentine fer to pour into the hole. Poor Ben were so upsot from the fall and the duckin' that he drunk up nearly half the turpentine out of the bottle afore he knowed what he was doin'.

"As I couldn't tend to the cow and Ben both to onct, I run fer Doc Beers.

The Home Rule of Eliza

Bimeby, me and Doc got the cow around alright, and Ben too, only Ben was a different sort of a critter after that, and died afore spring. Hold the plant fer me a minute, Abel."

Abel solicitously took the rubber-plant while Mrs. Morgan wiped a tear from her eye with the corner of her apron.

"Them was mighty interestin' days, 'Liza," tenderly remarked the sympathetic sergeant, shifting his weight and that of the rubber-plant to his peg-leg.

"Indeed they were, Abel. Happy ones too. I never thought then that I'd git so far down and poor as to—as to take care of the Poorhouse," sniffed the momentarily dejected matron.

Then seeing a pin on the floor, she picked it up and stuck it into her waist.

'Liza Takes Holt

“ ‘Liza Morgan, it ain’t a come-down at all,’ reassuringly exclaimed the sergeant. “You’ll be better took care of and more respected than you allow fer. Besides, with your salary and your assortment of pensions and no Dave to drink ‘em up, you kin lay a tidy sum aside aginst a rainy day,” replied Sergeant Gulick, forgetting the fact that each of Eliza’s former pensions stopped as she remarried.

“That’s so, Abel—Bless my patch, be that the seven o’clock whistle to the saw-mill?” exclaimed the astonished matron, her surprise driving away all evidence of her sorrow.

“I guess it be, ‘Liza,” answered Abel. “Come in, children! Salute the new Missus!”

Smiling at the staring line of youngsters, Mrs. Morgan entered the portals of her new home. Abel followed, ac-

The Home Rule of Eliza

companied by a few strains of "Hail to the Chief" played by Jerry McCracken on his fife, which instrument the young musician had deftly withdrawn from his sleeve—for Jerry was the musical genius of the institution, he and his ubiquitous fife being ever in evidence.

"I guess, Abel, afore I take real holt, you had better show me over the place. Oh! You kin set that rubber-plant down now," suggested the considerate matron, as she noticed that the sergeant was still tenaciously clinging to his burden.

As they entered the dining room, Mrs. Morgan espied a whip standing in the corner.

"Sence when had you a carriage, Abel?" asked the matron with a twinkle in her blue eyes.

"Why, that's a hoss-whip Ann use-

'Liza Takes Holt

ter use on the fractious ones, 'Liza. Sometimes they'd be wussern colts and need techin' up," apologetically replied the superintendent, flushing up.

"Well, Abel, to-morrow's goin' to be wash-day and as we'll need some kindlin's fer to start the fire, I guess we may as well begin makin' some right off!" and in less time than it took the astonished superintendent to grasp the situation, the whip was in fragments ready for the kitchen stove. The new régime was well under way.

Shortly before twelve o'clock the long table was drawn into the center of the dining-room and covered, much to the surprise of the sergeant, with the solitary and lonesome white table cloth. Under the old order of affairs this was never laid except at the monthly meeting of the committee, or when a delegation from the County Fe-

The Home Rule of Eliza

male Charities Aid Society made its annual and well-heralded round of the various county institutions.

Five minutes after the last echoes of the saw-mill's twelve o'clock whistle had died away over the distant hills, thirteen wondering children, spick and span in clean suits, clean faces and well brushed hair were seated at either side of the table. At the foot sat a nonplussed superintendent and at the head a smiling, contented matron. And to add to the astonishment of the inmates, there upon the table, in full view, was real butter and milk and sugar.

As the days went by, one after another of the irksome, antiquated and degrading rules and customs of the place were abolished, and, strange as it seemed to the superintendent, all for the better discipline of the Home.

'Liza Takes Holt

It was now Home, indeed; for the new matron never permitted the use of the terms "Poorhouse" or "Poorfarm"—it was always "Home." In many ways such as this Mrs. Morgan made life at the Almshouse as pleasant and as cheerful as possible for the inmates, all of whom were children at this time. Very rarely indeed could an adult, however old, poor or decrepit, be induced to take up his abode under the roof of the institution.

Perhaps the most audacious innovation of all the many changes brought about by the new matron was the abolition of the blue and white striped "bed-tick" clothes worn by the children. The committee bought this ticking by the bolt. The boys' suits were made of it in a single piece, waist and breeches all in one, buttons up the

The Home Rule of Eliza

front and, worst of all, not a single pocket—it was cheaper that way, contended Sam Canfield. The girls' suits were likewise made of one piece, waist and skirt, with buttons down the back. For years these habiliments had been the distinguishing feature of Horse Hill pauperism. Now they were but an unpleasant memory.

As was but natural, especially during the early part of the new matron's management, these changes were generally opposed by some member of the committee and always by Sam Canfield. On the other hand, Mrs. Morgan did not entirely lack support. As Abel Gulick once told several of his bosom friends, "'Liza Morgan'll never lack a champeen as long as Eph Lindsley be chairman of the committee—even if Deacon Canfield do be the boss of Hoss Hill.'" And so it proved.

'Liza Takes Holt

It was toward the end of the first week of her incumbency that Eliza approached the superintendent upon the subject of swimming.

"Abel," she remarked, "there be no good chance at the Home fer the girls to go swimmin' so it seems to me that it would be a mighty good thing fer them to go down to the krick. All the bigger boys goes down there and I always believed that gals should know how to swim jest as well as boys. We kin make bathin' suits out of some of them Sing Sing clothes and you kin go down to Fiddler's Hole and learn 'em how."

"By shote, 'Liza Morgan, what ever put sech a foolish notion in your head? How kin I learn them how to swim with my peg-leg?" queried the dumfounded superintendent, sticking out his wooden leg.

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“You needn’t go in, Abel,” she explained, “you kin jest lay flat-like on your stomach on the bank and give ‘em the right motions with your feet—or foot—and your hands, and you kin show ‘em how to hold up their heads, too—like this.”

At this juncture Mrs. Morgan attempted a demonstration by waving her hands and at the same time standing on one foot and kicking backward with the other.

“Not by a durn sight, ‘Liza Morgan! Not fer a million dollars—no—not fer ten million!” Abel exclaimed fearfully. “How’d I look flopped down on the bank of that krick and a-flappin’ my fins around like a windmill workin’ over time. Never, ‘Liza, never! Why, if Constable Young would ketch me cuttin’ up sech capers he’d take me in and send me up to the

'Liza Takes Holt

Funny House. No siree, 'Liza, never!" And the excited sergeant marched up and down the dining-room repeating, "Never! 'Liza, never!"

"Well, Abel Gulick, if you won't teach 'em, then I will!" With that the roiled matron snatched up her feather-duster and made for the door.

"Hold on! 'Liza, hold on!"

"Well?"

"Why, 'Liza, you can't swim and there are some purty deep parts to Fiddler's Hole."

"I ain't goin' in. I'm jest goin' to show 'em from the bank how to strike out and kick, that's all. Besides, Abel, no one kin see Fiddler's Hole from the road. It's beyond the hill yender."

"Well, if you be sot on't, I suppose I'll have to show 'em," replied the sergeant in a woe-begone tone of voice.

"That's right, Abel, now you're

The Home Rule of Eliza

talkin' sense. But don't let them go in when they be over-het or they'll git cramps, and if you jump in after them, your peg-leg might stick fast in the bottom of the krick and hold you down and you'll git drowned," admonished Mrs. Morgan.

CHAPTER III

THE BLIND GIRL'S LANTERN

WHILE Eliza Morgan was busting about the Home in her motherly fashion, bringing a ray of gladness and of cheer into the barren lives of the children under her charge, certain meddlesome tongues busied themselves in spreading reports of extravagance, fine dinners and suppers, and pampering of the inmates at the Almshouse. So loud grew the talk and so insistent the gossip that when the Township Committee met for its monthly meeting at the Home, there was at least one member who had come prepared to reform the institution and save the township from bankruptcy.

When the committee stepped upon

The Home Rule of Eliza

the porch, they beheld before them an iron mud scraper and also a new door mat. The other members slowly walked up to the door, but Samuel Canfield just as slowly turned about and sauntered to the rear entrance. As he approached he imagined he heard a click as of a key turning in a lock. Nothing daunted he seized the knob and tried to open the door. It was securely fastened and he found himself compelled to return to the front of the house and to enter even as his confrères had.

As the members of the committee filed into the dining-room where the meetings were usually held, great was their astonishment to see upon the neatly covered table a large pitcher of delicious lemonade and a dish of freshly baked jumbles. Such a thing had never before been heard of in the

The Blind Girl's Lantern

memory of the oldest committeeman, and it raised a doubt in the mind of even the most liberal member.

Having recovered from their surprise and, in spite of their doubts, having shown their appreciation of the unexpected treat, the committee got down to its work of inspection. In going over the bills, item after item was carefully scrutinized. Present prices were compared with previous ones. The daily and weekly per capita cost was gone over again and again. But turn and twist as the committee, and particularly the "Reformer," would, each computation of the running expenses of the institution showed that it was being managed on a more economical basis than ever before. Yet to all outward appearances it did seem as though the bills ought to be larger, considering the "style" in which the

The Home Rule of Eliza

inmates were living. Finally Samuel Canfield espied an item that seemed to shock him as though he had touched a live wire.

“July 8th.—to one lantern....49c”

“Mrs. Morgan, will you please and explain the meanin’ of this here item for a lantern?” asked Mr. Canfield with his severest frown.

“Well, Mr. Canfield, that lantern was bought fer Marion,” Mrs. Morgan replied briefly, probably scenting war.

“Fer Marion? Why, she’s blind. What in thunder kin a blind gal want of a lantern?” shouted Canfield, rising from his seat. “Mr. Chairman, I think this be an outrageous piece of extravagance. Extravagance, sir, pure and simple and you can’t make nothin’ else out of it. To think of spendin’ forty-nine cents of this township’s

The Blind Girl's Lantern

money fer a lantern fer a blind pauper! I never heard of sech a thing in all the years I've sot in this here board.'

"I, fer one," he snarled, turning toward the matron, "feel that Mrs. Morgan must either pay fer that lantern herself or else fer her to resign. This township can't and won't stand fer any sech squanderin' of its money."

"Mrs. Morgan, will you please to inform the committee more fully regardin' this here item?" asked the chairman, giving the matron a look betokening his confidence in her judgment.

"Well, you see, Eph, it was like this. Sometimes at night we have to send up to the store fer things fer the next day so's to have them early. Most of the children are afeard to go by the graveyard on account of the spooks, and so

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Marion, the blind girl, usually goes. But jest afore I bought the lantern she was e'enamost run over by a team comin' down the hill near Barney Finnegin's. So I says to her that I would get a lantern fer her, and then when she had to go out nights, folks'd see her comin' and would turn out."

"Mr. Chairman, here be fifty cents fer that lantern," indignantly exclaimed Commissioner Messler. "I don't purpose to set here and say and do nothin' when sech a measly sum as that there be questioned—and fer sech a good cause too!"

"Amzi Messler, you'll jest set down and put your fifty cents in your pocket, and mighty quick, too, I kin tell you. Nearly all of us feel jest as you do and—"

Before Lindsley could finish, Canfield was again upon his feet, glaring

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from one member of the board to the other.

"It ain't a question of this one item," he shouted; "it's a question of the hull management of the institution. Afore Ann Gulick were took sick we got rid of them paupers afore they were too big. But Ann were sick nigh onto two years and so we jest had to leave 'em—particularly the older ones—to help her and Abel run the place. Why, it never was heard of afore that we allowed them critters to remain in this Poorhouse till they were over fourteen, like that blind gal and that cripple and several others. We useter bind 'em out or give 'em away afore they were fourteen, and you all know it, too. But with no one wantin' a cripple or a blind gal and Ann needin' the oldest ones, I tell you we be jest goin' bankrupt, sure as

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time, and all because we be over-loaded.”

“Set down, Sam; you be clean off the pint of the subject,” called Hiram Pierson.

“I don’t care if I be,” the irate Deacon shouted, shaking his finger at his neighbor. “I’m goin’ to have this thing out now onct fer all—”

“Shet up, Sam!” cried Abner Darby, enjoying the confusion that reigned.

The Deacon paid no attention to the interruption, but turned to the matron and shook his fist.

“Sence you’re in, ‘Liza Morgan,” he bellowed, “you’re jest raisin’ thunder and beeswax all the time. Fer nigh onto sixty years them paupers as would come here was put in regular uniforms so’s you could tell ‘em a mile away and keep decent children off’n

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'em. The fust thing you do when you take holt is to tog them up in reg'lar clothes like decent folks's children. And this here confounded committee takes your part every time I try to set on you. Why, there were a time when you could spot a gradyate from this here Poorhouse twenty years after he left. Yes, thirty years after—"

"Mr. Chairman," interrupted Hiram Pierson, "I object to Sam Canfield takin' up the time of this meetin' with the ancient history of this here Poorhouse."

"Jest one word more, Hi Pierson," Canfield said. Turning to the chairman, he continued: "Next spring will be township election, Eph Lindsley, and I tell you now you don't git back on this committee; and you, 'Liza Morgan,'" he said, turning to the matron with a very low bow, "will be fired at

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the fust meetin' of the new committee." Standing erect he slapped his chest and exultingly cried, "*Fer I'm goin' to be the next chairman.*"

Eph Lindsley's big form slowly arose, and he looked the Deacon straight in the face.

"Sam," he said, "when you threaten me you don't scare me no more than a leetle pesky yellow-jacket. But when you talk to 'Liza Morgan that way, I won't stand fer it. If it weren't fer this lady bein' here I guess I'd give you a durn good lickin'. Well, mebbe I wouldn't. You ain't worth it, come to think of it."

"Is that so! Is that so!" shouted the Deacon, growing purple. "Well, don't you forgit what I told you jest now, Eph Lindsley. I must have been crazy when I made you chairman last year—"



"I'm goin' to be the next chairman."

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The Blind Girl's Lantern

“You know very well you didn’t make me chairman,” Eph interjected vehemently.

“If you say that you’re an ingrate!” thundered Canfield. “And by Judas! there won’t neither you nor ‘Liza Morgan say much more after I git through in the spring. And there won’t be no more back talk from the rest of the committee either, I can tell you that!”

“I guess this has gone jest fur enough fer one day. I declare this meetin’ adjourned!” exclaimed Lindsley, giving the table such a whack with his improvised gavel that pieces of corn-cob pipe flew in all directions.

CHAPTER IV

SHOOTIN' HONORS

JERRY McCACKEN was the musical prodigy of the Home. Red-headed, freckle-faced, pug-nosed, misshapen Jerry McCracken; bright, happy, twinkling-eyed, little Jerry McCracken. All of the abuse, pain and mortification inflicted upon him by the former matron had not crushed or destroyed the natural buoyancy and effervescence of his spirit. After some unusually severe or unjust punishment, Jerry would cry as though his little heart would break. But generally in those dark moments, Marion would seek him out—no doubt a mutual bond of affliction drew them together—bringing solace and comfort to the little

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cripple. Sometimes she found him in the shadow of an old tombstone upon a moss-covered grave in the near-by churchyard or lying beneath the over-hanging willow on the Poorhouse plot, his face set in hard, harsh lines and his thoughts revengeful. But no matter where he happened to fling himself, his heart and soul filled with bitterness, Marion would search for him and find him. Seated by his side and whispering words of hope and sympathy, she dried his tears and soon their little hands would meet in a confiding, childish clasp. Then she would sing some song the boy loved and before the melody was finished, Jerry always became again the bright, happy child nature intended him to be. When the last note had died away, he would spring up and plucking the sweetest flower to be found, bring it to his comforter and

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endeavor to tell her of the wondrously beautiful colors of the blossom. There was one song, however, that Marion sometimes sang to him, particularly when she herself was sad, that Jerry could not comprehend. Often when the melancholy strains had ceased he would say that he did not know what it meant.

“Neither do I, Jerry,” she invariably replied, “but some day we may understand it.”

What with his natural ear for music and the tunes that Marion taught him, Jerry soon became an accomplished player. And now the happy notes of his fife sounded in and about the institution whenever the boy had a leisure moment. It added a touch of happiness and joy to the Home that often brought the tears to the eyes of the new matron, tears that sprang from

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a heart overflowing with tenderness and sympathy for the unfortunate children in her charge. But for Abel, the high, clear notes were an unceasing delight. Strangely familiar emotions struggled for expression as he listened while Jerry played some martial strain. Visions of distant battle-fields flitted across his mind, and he felt a strange unrest. One afternoon as Jerry gaily fifeed the reveille, he thought of his old comrade-in-arms at the Soldiers' Home, Dave Morgan, now so near the Morning Call that would summon him to take his place amid the legions of the blessed. As he mused, the remembrance of a promise made long ago came full upon him, and in a flash he saw how opportune Jerry and his fife would be in its performance.

Thus was engendered the idea of

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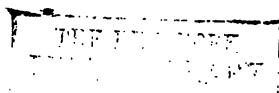
using Jerry as a nucleus around which to build a fife and drum corps. After many long and perplexing hours of deep thought, breathing not a word of his intention to a living soul, the sergeant finally decided to secure the necessary instruments. It is almost impossible to imagine the surprise of **Mrs. Morgan** and the untold joy of the children when Abel trudged up the walk of the Home one day and deposited a bass-drum and two snare-drums upon the porch.

With the return of some of the sergeant's former knowledge of drumming and with the assistance of the intuitive Jerry, the Horse Hill Fife and Drum Corps made rapid strides toward perfection. In its ranks were enrolled Jabez Tucker and Nathan Stiles who played the snare-drums, Rufus Fróst, a little Southern darkie nicknamed



**Abel trudged up the walk with a bass-drum
and two snare-drums.**

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“Snowdrop,” who played the bass-drum, and, of course, Jerry and his fife.

At first the boys drilled in their ordinary clothes but this did not meet the sergeant’s sense of the fitness of things. Proper uniforms were needed to lend a correct military air to the corps. Following the superintendent’s suggestion, Eliza brought out some of the old, striped suits, dyed them blue and made them over into natty jackets and breeches adorned with many brass buttons, utterly transforming the former badges of shame and indignity into royal insignia of pride and self-respect. And with caps obtained from the local G. A. R. post, the lads were togged up to the complete satisfaction of the proud sergeant and the surprise of the Horse Hillers. But the true motive behind

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the organization of the corps was not learned until later.

It was early in September that the sergeant's carefully planned finale took place. Word was received from the Soldiers' Home that David Morgan was rapidly failing and a few days later Mrs. Morgan learned that her husband had gone to the Last Bivouac. The body of the veteran was to arrive at the village on Thursday on the afternoon train to be buried in the soldiers' plot in the Horse Hill cemetery. At Abel's suggestion the funeral cortège awaited the remains at the station ready to escort them to the burying ground where the services were to be held.

Great was the surprise of the mourners—and they comprised the entire village and country-side—when shortly before the arrival of the train,

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there came wafted to the waiting throng the strains of martial music. Soon the Home Fife and Drum Corps drew near with Sergeant Gulick, resplendent in renovated uniform, and brightly polished buttons, at the head. To the slow strains of Pleyel's Hymn, the sergeant led his band up to the platform. With a wonderful sweep of his arms in true impressario fashion, the music ceased. At the same instant the faraway whistle of a locomotive broke the sudden stillness. In a few moments the train appeared around the curve and came to a stop at the station platform. The bearers deposited the remains of the veteran in the hearse, the procession formed and to the tune of the Dead March from "Saul" the mourners marched to the soldiers' plot in the village cemetery.

The services were about to be con-

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cluded and the casket lowered when a sudden paroxysm seized the sergeant.

“By shote, boys,” he groaned, “I clean fergot all about the salute!”

Telling Jerry to strike up “Marching Through Georgia,” he wheeled his band around and led it toward the Home on the double-quick. Arriving there Abel went into the cellar and dragged forth the old, rusty piece of artillery that had done such good service for the past fifty years at all national celebrations. Then he rushed up to his room and soon appeared with his powder flask. Measuring out a proper charge he was about to pour it into the cannon when he discovered that he had no wadding. Placing the charge upon the floor, he hastened to the kitchen and quickly returned with several copies of *The Banner*. Then pouring the powder into the cannon he

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rammed it home with strips of the county-seat journal. With gun primed, the sergeant gave the order to right-about-face and the band moved off again on the double-quick.

Great was Abel's chagrin when he found the mourners slowly wending their way toward the exit of the cemetery. With a loud "Ah-tention!" he lined his little company up beside the drive-way and just as Deacon Canfield drove past in his buggy, touched off the ancient "blunderbuss." There was a thundering report, a loud "Whoa!" from the Deacon as his horse bolted down the road, and a blood-curdling yell from the sergeant as he landed head over heel in the shrubbery.

When he was withdrawn from his uneasy position, his face bleeding from a multitude of scratches, it was thought that the sergeant was fear-

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fully if not mortally wounded. On closer inspection, however, it was seen that the bursting cannon had merely shattered Abel's peg-leg. After proper internal restoratives had been administered and a cane had been furnished by one of the mourners to take the place of the splintered limb, Abel and his band silently marched toward the Home. With a naïve twinkle in his eye, Jerry asked, "What tune shall we play, Mr. Gulick?" The sergeant, looking straight ahead, muttered something below his breath and hobbled steadily on.

Arriving at the Home the first thing the discomfited sergeant discovered was that in his excitement he had left the proper charge of powder upon the porch floor and in its stead had poured the entire contents of the powder flask into the cannon. Secondly, he saw the

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Widow Morgan standing in the doorway tearing a sheet into bandages.

“Why, Abel, you ain’t hurt so bad after all!” exclaimed Eliza as the sergeant settled into a rocker on the porch. “Guess I won’t need these bandages—jest the liniment and some court plaster.” And the matron hurried into the house.

She returned in a moment and spangled Abel’s face with pieces of white, black and pink plaster. Then drawing up a chair she said, “Now, Abel, I want to know what it’s all about. What possessed you to shoot off that old cannon? That weren’t no place fer sech foolishness.”

“It wasn’t foolishness, ‘Liza,” remonstrated Abel as he began splicing two pieces of hickory hop-pole to the remains of his peg-leg. “You see, me and your Dave what use to be agreed

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one night that if one of us was to die, the remainin' survivor was to git the old cannon out and fire a partin' farewell salute while they was lowerin' the corpse into the ground. Well, I heard as how poor Dave was gittin' on, and so I says nothing to no one, but jest organizes the Fife and Drum Corps to give Dave a grand funeral with military honors. That's why I fit up the boys. I was so tickled the way we looked marchin' to the cemetery that I clean fergot all about the salute until they was e'enamost ready to put Dave in the hole. Then I remembers about it and hikes the band over here on the double-quick, allowin' that I'd be back in time to do the shootin' honors by Dave. When I seen you all comin' away, I knowed it were now or never with that promise and so I jest sot the old thing down and teched her off."

Shootin' Honors

“Well, Abel, I’m glad no one was hurt. That old cannon blowin’ up like that was mighty dangerous.—I wonder did Sam Canfield’s mare run very fur?”

“I dunno, but it were mighty funny the way the Deacon hollered. It were about the last thing I heard as I went adivin’ into the bushes. I’m glad I scared him though, even if I did lose most of my peg-leg and git scratched up a bit. If he ain’t the—”

“Here he comes up the road now,” exclaimed Mrs. Morgan as the Deacon and his rig appeared around the bend. “Seems he’s all right, but the mare looks kind of done up.”

“I guess he lammed the life out of her jest to learn her a lesson.—Hello, Sam, did you enjoy your extry ride?” called the sergeant as Canfield came within earshot.

The Deacon answered never a word,

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but gave his mare a vicious cut with the whip.

“By Judas!” he muttered under his breath, “I’ll git even with the both of ‘em next spring or my name ain’t Sam Canfield.”

CHAPTER V

THE RAIN BARREL

THE long day's work was done. The children were in the yard playing and romping. Their frequent shouts of laughter lent a happy charm to the place and probably sounded strangely in the ears of some of the passers-by. Abel Gulick, a single piece of court plaster the only vestige of his accident, sat at one end of the porch intermittently puffing on his pipe. To him there was a strange neatness about the Home. A new picket fence stretched the entire length of the front yard; the paths were well kept and covered with fresh gravel; the boxwood hedge was evenly trimmed and the open spaces were filled in with new

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shrubs. On either side of the path was a round flower-bed set with marigolds, sage, geraniums and dahlias, and all enclosed by a row of variegated colea. A border of washed clam-shells encircled each plot. The four towering walnut trees with their massive trunks and be-cobwebbed branches, their limbs bending down with the burden of their green and golden spheres, seemed as different as the rest of the yard. Even the heaps of black, decaying shells that formerly had been allowed to accumulate year after year about the ground were absent.

As Abel half unconsciously noted these changes, his thoughts turned toward their author and for the first time he fully realized how smoothly and strongly and happily flowed the current of the life at the Home since Eliza Morgan had come to guide its course.

The Rain Barrel

He settled deeper into his chair, his mind and soul filled with a great content. He dreamed. But even as he mused a discordant thought seemed clamoring for recognition and marred the full measure of his tranquillity. He stirred uneasily. The Deacon—spring elections—another Ann Gulick. With a shudder, he dismissed the unwelcome thought and fell into a doze.

Upon the other end of the porch, all unconscious that she filled the sergeant's thoughts, sat Eliza endeavoring to read something in *The Banner* that seemed of unusual interest. But her reading was fitful, for at almost every sentence she waved the sheet about her head in a vain attempt to drive away the clouds of mosquitoes that sang about her. First she slapped one bare arm and then the other. After awhile she rolled down one sleeve and in a

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moment the other. Finally she wound her apron about her head. But she would not stop her reading until she had finished the article.

“They’ve been awful this summer—worse than ever before,” she exclaimed aloud, brandishing her paper and arousing the warrior from his dreams. “Fust they seem to peter out a bit, and then in a few days they light down on us more than ever—regular crops-like, jest as it says in *The Banner*. It always seemed to me as if the old ones went off to a picnic fer a spell and then come back at us with their stomachs empty and their bills extry sharpened.”

“What’s that you’re readin’?” Abel asked yawning.

“An article by some professor on bugs in this week’s *Banner*,” she replied, waving her hand before her face.

The Rain Barrel

“It tells how mosquitoes are growed.”

“They grow in wet grass at the full of the moon,” Abel answered positively. “The bug man’s talk is all hum-bug.”

“That ain’t so, Abel. You jist blow smoke at ’em and listen whilst I read you what it says.”

So Eliza read aloud how mosquitoes breed in stagnant water wherever it accumulates; in tin cans, in rain barrels or in swamps; how the larvae or “wrigglers” are hatched from little floating, boat-shaped masses of eggs, and how these “wrigglers,” after snapping and darting through the water for a few days, turn into dull, inert pupae tossed about by every ripple until, in a few days more, the damp, frail insect emerges from its cramped abode, and balancing itself upon its discarded casing, dries its wings in a ray of sun-

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light or a passing breeze, and flies away to battle and rapine.

“You don’t mean to say them pesky leetle critters is hatched out of eggs, the same as any other kind of a bird, exceptin’ that the eggs are laid in water!” wonderingly asked the sergeant, his face a picture of mingled astonishment and disbelief.

“Yes they be, fer *The Banner* never lies,” asserted Eliza.

“By shote! who’d a thunk it?” exclaimed Abel.

“Well, let’s go and see fer ourselves,” said the matron. And taking a glass that was standing upon the nearby window-sill, she preceded Abel to the back of the house.

“There you be, Abel Gulick!” she triumphantly exclaimed, as she dipped the glass into the rain barrel and then held it up to the light.

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“Why, them’s pollywogs!” asserted Abel with a skeptical laugh.

“Oh, no they hain’t! The bug professor says they’re ‘wrigglers’ and that we’ll have thousands of fresh mosquitoes from this here barrel in several days. And they’ll keep a-comin’ as long as the water lasts.”

“How be you goin’ to kill ‘em, then, ‘Liza?” asked the perplexed man as he recharged his pipe.

“Look out! Git away or else hist your leg with the boot on and I’ll show you!” cried the matron and just as Abel reached a place of safety she upset the barrel and sent the “wrigglers” sailing down the yard on the crest of a rushing tide of rain-water.

“There! If it takes standin’ water fer them to breed in, I guess breedin’ days is over fer them critters around this house.”

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At that moment the children came trooping up and at their request, the matron delivered an impromptu lecture on the growth and extermination of mosquitoes. She found the children greatly interested in her bit of natural history and when she finished she formed them into a volunteer corps to inspect the entire village for the purpose of discovering and destroying all likely breeding spots.

“But don’t go on Sam Canfield’s property,” Mrs. Morgan cautioned them. ““You know how he hates you orphans and if he’d ketch any of you on his place he’d lick you or sic his dog at you.””

“All right, Mrs. Morgan. We’ll be careful,” came in a cheery chorus from the children. Then a little voice piped, “Oh, Miss’ Mohgan! How many of them little bugs was in the barrel?”

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“I dunno, Rufus,” Mrs. Morgan answered, “but there’s somethin’ in *The Banner* on that pint. I wonder could any of you children work it out?”

Opening the paper, she read, “If one mosquito lays four hundred eggs and in about ten days these eggs hatch out; and if half of those four hundred mosquitoes are females who in turn lay four hundred eggs apiece; how many will there be in four such hatchings or in forty days from now?”

“Remember,” she continued, “only half of each hatchin’ are females. Now to whosomever gits the right answer, I’ll give an extry piece of pie when I bake Saturday.”

Just before bed-time that night, Mrs. Morgan asked, “Well, children, how many of you have the answer to that sum?”

Not a child replied.

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“All those who have an answer hold up their hands.”

Not a hand was raised.

“I don’t blame you,” smilingly exclaimed the matron after a short silence. “I guess that sum would puzzle e’namost any growed up person.”

Suddenly a little, black hand went up.

“What is it, Rufus? Did you git it?”

“Yassum!”

“Good fer you. What is the answer?”

“I’se got it in mah book.”

“Go git it and we’ll see how near right you be.”

In a short time Rufus returned with a piece of paper covered with figures and many queer drawings, and gravely handed it to the matron.

Surrounded by the inmates of the

The Rain Barrel

Home, Eliza endeavored to decipher the hieroglyphics on the sheet.

“Bless my patch, Rufus,” she finally exclaimed, “you’ll have to explain your work. Where be your fust sum?”

With a dusky finger, Rufus pointed to a strange object that might have been meant for a bird or beast or even a torpedo boat.

“Dat am de fust mosquitah,” he said.

“That’s fine. Now where is the fust hatching?”

“De fust what?”

“The fust hatching. The mosquitoes that were hatched from the eggs laid by this one you jest showed me.”

“He didn’t lay no aigs. Dat one down dar was gwine to lay de aigs,” replied Snowdrop, pointing to a drawing that looked like a stogie on wings.

“Oh, is that the mamma mosquito?”

“Yassum!”

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“Well, now, where be her childern?”

“She ain’t got any.”

“She hain’t?”

“No’um. She flewed away.”

“She flew away before she laid her eggs!”

“Yassum!”

“But what do these figures mean?” asked Eliza, pointing to a mass of numerals.

“Dem figures am de aigs what she would have laid if she hadn’t flewed away,” replied Snowdrop proudly.

This was too much for the audience. Everyone burst into a shout of laughter in which Rufus himself joined heartily.

When the mirth had ceased, Mrs. Morgan patted the little darkie on the shoulder.

“You did the best you knew how, any way, Rufus,” she said, “and that’s all any of us kin do. Saturday you’ll

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git your extry piece of pie jest the same.”

Opening *The Banner* she read: “ ‘At the end of the forty days there will have been bred from one female about three billion, two hundred million mosquitoes in round numbers. They would weigh one and one-half tons—’ ”

“By shote, they’d fill a couple of Eph Lindsley’s hay wagons,” estimated Abel offhand.

Eliza continued, “ ‘If these mosquitoes were laid end to end, they would reach half way around the world—and all from one great, great grandmother.’ ”

CHAPTER VI

RUFUS GETS A BITE

THE children's campaign against the mosquito was carried on the next day with renewed vigor. Before breakfast two of the boys, wandering about in search of likely breeding spots, found that the submerged portion of the meadow behind the Home was teeming with wrigglers. They reported to the matron and after the morning meal all other work was stopped. The boys were armed with shovels and spades. The superintendent was put in command and the little army set out to drain the marsh—an undertaking not very arduous as it covered but a half acre. Rufus Frost, his kinky head adorned with a gorgeous

Rufus Gets a Bite

jockey-cap, with his boon companion Lazarus, a mongrel yellow pup, trotting at his heels, led the procession. At every step, with shouts and many gestures he urged those behind him to make haste or he would have the work completed before they arrived.

Abel brought up the rear, and from this point of vantage, when they reached the swamp, he marshalled the happy band of children into squads to facilitate the work. Then, to add the proper stimulus, he spread the news that as a reward for their labor, Mrs. Morgan intended taking them to the fair the next week.

With a shout, the boys fell to work, and plied their spades with might and main. The sergeant, seeing his charges so busily at work, thought it safe to retire. So admonishing them to persevere in their labors, he with-

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drew to the peace of the front porch of the Home, where he smoked his pipe in leisurely comfort.

No sooner had the superintendent taken his departure than Rufus quietly laid down his spade, dropped several worms into his pocket and slipped away to the banks of the creek that flowed a short distance from the swamp. Drawing a fish line from his pocket, he baited the hook, tossed it into the stream and sat down to wait for a bite, with Lazarus stretched out at his side. The bite failed to materialize. The September sun rose high in the heavens, its rays poured down upon boy and pup. Snowdrop grew sleepy. He could scarcely keep his fluttering eye-lids open far enough to enable him to see his float. Then he hit upon an expedient. Tying the string to his ankle, he stretched himself out upon

Rufus Gets a Bite

the bank and allowed his feet to dangle in the water. Lazarus crawled nearer to his dusky little master and in a few moments both were sound asleep.

How long Rufus lay there oblivious of his surroundings and forgetful of his comrades laboring in the meadow, no one ever knew, but suddenly the ditchers were startled by a succession of unearthly yells. Rushing in the direction of the cries, they found the little darkie squirming and twisting upon the bank of the creek. He was howling and screaming as only a thoroughly frightened pickaninny can. His eyes were rolling in terror. With one hand he was clutching at his kinky wool, while with the other he waved his cap around like a flail. His leg, swaying about as he held it aloft, told the tale, for dangling from his big toe was a small snapping-turtle.

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After several vain attempts to break the turtle's hold, the boys were obliged to desist as they feared that Rufus would work himself into a fit. Then, grasping him by his arms and legs, the turtle swinging like a pendulum at every step, they bore their shrieking burden homeward. The cries of the darkie and the shouts and exclamations of the boys heralded their approach. When the pandemonium burst upon Mrs. Morgan's ears, she rushed to the kitchen door. With a cry of horror she beheld a group of youngsters carrying what appeared to her to be the body of a drowned boy. But as she seized a churn upon which to roll the victim she became aware of her mistake, for far above the din caused by the boys and the yelping of Lazarus, rose the screams of Rufus. Soon she distinguished the wooly head and dis-

Rufus Gets a Bite

torted face of the darkie and then the turtle dangling from his foot. Instantly grasping the situation, she dropped the churn, drew her shears from beneath her apron, seized the turtle and was about to sever its distended neck.

“Oh, Mis’ Mohgan,” cried Rufus as he saw the gleaming blades, “Mis’ Mohgan, please don’t cut off mah foot. Please, please, Mis’ Mohgan,” he entreated, turning gray with fear, his kinky hair standing on end and his eyes rolling about in the wildness of despair, “Please, Mis’ Mohgan, don’t chop off mah foot!”

“Hush, Snowdrop!” commanded the matron. “I ain’t agoin’ to chop your foot off. Jest hold still a minute and we’ll git this critter loose in a jiffy.”

With one snip of her scissors, the matron severed the neck near the shell.

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The body dropped to the ground. Slowly the jaws relaxed and the head fell off. Then tenderly lifting the moaning picaninny up in her arms she carried him to the Home and laid him down upon the grass. With a roll of bandages and a pot of her "Healin' Salve" for which she was famous about the country-side, the wounded member was dressed in a fashion that would have satisfied the most fastidious surgeon. Rufus was set upon his feet, quite recovered from his terror of the moment before. Indeed, he limped about exceedingly proud of his banded toe.

The excitement soon died down and after dinner the boys returned to the marsh to finish their ditching operations. But they went without Rufus. He was seated in state in the porch rocker, his injured toe resting upon a

Rufus Gets a Bite

cushion, while about him were gathered the girls of the Home listening to his animated recital of the accident. He was not to rest in peace for long, however, as suddenly a voice was heard calling:

“Ru—fus! Ru—fus! Come here!”

It was Mrs. Morgan. After the kind-hearted woman’s sympathy for the darkie in distress had somewhat cooled, she remembered that instead of fishing he should have been at work in the meadow. The sudden call breaking in upon Snowdrop’s story was the result of her cogitations.

“Rufus, what were you doin’ fishin’ instead of helpin’ the other boys?”

“Please, Mis’ Mohgan, I was jest tryin’ out mah new fish line.”

“Where did you git it?”

“I got it offen Pinkus Liebstein fo’ ten cents I found by de postoffice.”

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"I didn't know that Pinkus had a fish line. Where did he git it?" queried the matron.

This was Snowdrop's opportunity. He saw that by relating how Pinkus became possessed of such a treasure as a fishing line, he might divert the matron's anger.

From his story it appeared that Pinkus had earned a shoe string by feeding the pigs for Jerry McCracken when it was the latter's turn. With this slender stock in trade, Pinkus began to barter. His instinctive acumen for driving a bargain turned every exchange to his advantage. The shoe string was soon replaced by three marbles which were subsequently exchanged for two alleys. These were shortly traded for an old, two-bladed jack-knife with one of the blades broken but the other in a sufficiently service-

Rufus Gets a Bite

able condition for the average boy. But Pinkus was not content to rest as the proud possessor of a real knife. He sold his stock of cutlery to a village lad for nine cents in cash—he had originally demanded thirteen but as the prospective buyer possessed but nine, the embryo merchant after much protestation, surrendered the blade for the nine coppers.

With nine pennies jingling in his pocket, his possibilities were now unlimited. He conceived a brilliant scheme. He knew that the chief ambition of Rufus was to own a fishing line and that the little darkie would concede to any conditions to possess one. So he hurried to Hiram Pier-
son's general store on a shopping ex-
pedition. The cheapest line in the store was marked ten cents but in less than three minutes Pinkus had struck

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a bargain with the clerk. For seven cents he obtained not only a line but also two hooks to boot, with the privilege of returning them the next day should the purchase prove unsatisfactory.

Hastening home, the Son of Trade whispered something to the little Ethiopean. In a moment the two youthful representatives of their respective ancient races might have been seen sitting behind the barn in earnest, though quiet, conference. When they separated Pinkus was relieved of further worry about feeding the pigs and went whistling past the barn, jingling a dime against his two coppers. And Rufus had the fishing line.

“Well, Rufus,” remarked the matron as the boy concluded his story, “You run along now and play. I ain’t got time to listen to sech foolishness.”

CHAPTER VII

AT THE FAIR

THE matron was comfortably ensconced in a rocking chair on the front porch of the Home. Through the trailing vines that covered the western end of the veranda the afternoon sun poured its mellow rays, casting upon the floor dancing, shifting checkered spots of light and shadow. It was mid-way between the work that followed dinner and the work that preceded supper. Eliza was snatching a few moments of well-earned repose and nothing rested her mind and body more than to sit and gaze at the panorama of field and dale and hill and scattered, white-walled, red-roofed farmhouses that stretched to the foot of the distant

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Picatinny Mountains. Autumn was already beginning to lay her wonder-working hand upon the landscape. Ripened sumach lent a fringe of blazing crimson to the rut-marked road that wound down past the Home, across the white-washed bridge that spanned the lazy creek, and on to the village nestling in the hollow of the little valley. The whole country-side was a riot of glorious color. Golden-rod, fringed gentians, ironwort and cardinal flowers vied with each other in their wondrous hues. Deep, full yellows, browns and reds of early changing trees mingled with the shifting greens of hemlock, oak and spruce. It was a passionate, breathing picture of beauty painted from Nature's own palette and by her own hand.

A figure trudging up the road added the human touch to the scene. As the

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stout, broad-shouldered form drew nearer, Eliza recognized Eph Lindsley.

“Hold on a minute, Eph!” she called just as he reached the big maple by the gate.

At the sound of his name Lindsley turned.

“Why, hello, ’Liza, I didn’t see you afore,” he cried as the matron hurried down the path. “Ain’t this a great day!”

“It sure be, Eph,” answered Eliza as they shook hands. “I jest been settin’ up there on the porch enjoyin’ it a bit afore gittin’ to work agin. I was thinkin’ I’d like to be a poet and write about all them beautiful scenes.” With a sweep of her arm she took in the whole wonderful view. “Look at old Hoss Hill a-standin’ there jest like a lonesome watchman in green and gold a-guardin’ the purple gates of

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them mountains over yender. And see the krick down there a-lazyin' along like it had nothin' to do but jest sparkle in the sunshine fer a livin'; and that big willer tree on our plot—it appears to be a-weepin' fer all the sins of Hoss Hill."

"It couldn't weep enough fer Sam's, though," Eph remarked with a wink and a broad smile.

"Nope. It would take several fer his'n." Eliza looked peacefully up into the cerulean depths and forgot about her adversary. "Ain't that sky fine?" she asked.

"If it only stays like this fer the fair, Thursday, I won't have no kick comin'," declared Eph, drawing a deep breath of the clear, bracing air.

"That's jest what I wanted to see you about.—No, not the weather," answered Eliza as Eph quizzically as-

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sured her that he had no influence over the elements, "but about doin' some-
thin' fer the childern."

"You know I'll be glad to do any-
thing I kin, 'Liza," he replied. "What
do you want?"

"Well, you see, Eph, I promised to give the childern a holiday to the fair fer ditchin' the swamp and I thought mebbe you could take 'em there in your big body-wagon, if it wouldn't be too much trouble fer you."

"Why, it won't be no trouble at all,
'Liza. I sure kin do it, and I will,
too," he returned, his tone showing his evident desire to be of service to the matron. "They've surely earned a trip like that. I hain't seen so few mosquitoes all summer as since the ditchin'."

"Eph, you sure have the right kind of a heart! I jest knowed you'd do

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it!" exclaimed Eliza, bestowing a bright smile upon the chairman as he shifted from one foot to the other, embarrassed by the matron's praise. "You come fer the childern, then, and you needn't bring anything exceptin' fodder fer your team 'cause I'll fix enough lunch fer all of us."

"All right, 'Liza," he replied as he turned to go, "I'll be around about nine o'clock."

With a word of farewell, he continued up the road and Eliza turned into the house.

When the matron told the children the good news, their excitement could scarcely be contained within the walls of the Home. And when, on the morning of the fair, Eph Lindsley actually drove up to the door to carry them to the pleasure grounds their joy was beyond all measure.

At the Fair

Into the wagon the children scrambled, happy, eager and excited. Mrs. Morgan took her place near the front, carefully guarding the lunch. In the rear, the sergeant commanded his fife and drum corps. Eph snapped his whip, and to the strains of martial music the gaily decorated wagon started fairward.

They had gotten no further than Finnegin's Inn when Mrs. Morgan suddenly exclaimed, "Stop, Eph! I've fer-got my umbrella and mebbe we'll have a buckwheat shower afore we git back. Rufus, run back and git it. It's standin' behind the kitchen door—Here's the key."

Just as Rufus returned with the umbrella and was clambering into the wagon, Barney Finnegin, in his holiday regalia, stepped to the door of his tavern.

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“Hello, Eph, and every one!” he cried. “And are yez afther goin’ to the fair?”

“Yep!” replied Lindsley, “and if you’re goin’ too, jest jump up here with me and we’ll take you down. That’s the idea. Guess we’re all ready,” and clucking to his horses, they started again.

As the outfit rolled into town and around the village green, the drum corps struck up “The Campbells Are Coming.” In an instant every door and every window was crowded with cheering citizens. Rufus found the occasion one of supreme delight. His cap cocked rakishly on his kinky head, and his face split from ear to ear by a grin that showed every one of his white teeth, the little darkie pounded the bass-drum with gusto and spirit until the last house had been passed.

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When they reached the fair grounds, Eph drove up under a convenient oak. In a twinkling, the wagon was empty and the merry time began. For the children, the majority of whom had never been beyond the confines of the village, at least since their entrance into the Almshouse, and to whom such a thing as an excursion, a picnic or a circus was known only by hearsay, the fair was a continual round of delight.

While the happy party, escorted by Eph and Barney, strolled from one attraction to another, Abel slipped away in search of possible acquaintances. Suddenly he caught sight of an old comrade-in-arms watching a half a dozen men play a modified form of roulette common to country fairs.

“Why, if it ain’t Jabez Marsh!” cried the delighted sergeant, clapping the surprised veteran on the back so

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energetically that he knocked his G. A. R. hat over his eyes. "Hain't seen you in a month of Sundays. By shote! Jabez, not sence last Decoration Day, if I remembers right!"

"Abel Gulick, by socks!" exclaimed Comrade Marsh, arranging his head-gear. "What be you doin' down here to the fair?"

"Goin' to play Eph Lindsley's hoss that's goin' to run against the Deacon's, Jabez. Thought I'd come early and git a tip. What d'ye say, I'll bet you two dollars 'even up on 'Shellbark.' "

Jabez Marsh's face assumed a most woe-begone expression.

"Abel, I'm clean skint out of every dollar I had in the world!" he said in a tone of voice suited to the expression.

"Why, how did that happen, Jabez?"

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“Well, you see, I come down here with what was left out of my last quarter’s pension—I jest drawed it day ‘fore yesterday—and ‘lowed I’d spend about two dollars or two and a half of it here. I was a durn fool to bring all of it with me, because some fellers over yender behind the rise skint me.”

“What were you doin’, playin’ three card monte or a gold-brick game?” asked the sarcastic sergeant.

“No, siree, I’m on to them games. This was a new one to me. It were played with three walnut shells. And by ginger! Abel, I’ll swear to my dyin’ day that that there ball was under the shell I picked out. It was there as sure as I’m alive!”

“As sure as you are skint alive, I guess, Jabez,” remarked the sergeant. “Howsomever, it’s a new one to me, too. How be it played?”

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“ ‘Tain’t played at all. You jest pick out the shell that’s got the little ball under it and you git the money.’”

“That’s mighty easy, Jabez, but your information’s about as clear as mud.”

“That’s right, Abel Gulick, rub it in. Make fun of your old tent-mate. Laugh when he ain’t got forty cents to his name and owin’ two weeks board and nigh onto three dollars fer tobaccy and things. I—”

“Hold on, Jabez, hold on. I weren’t rubbin’ it in,” interrupted Abel; “I was jest goin’ to allow that you be an easy mark.”

“Rub it in! Rub it in! That’s all you care fer me, and me not havin’ no chanct fer to git to the encampment next week. And it’ll be the fust one I’ve missed since ‘72,” said Jabez, a quiver in his voice.

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“By shote, Jabez! I never thought of that. How much did you drop?”

“Nigh onto twelve dollars.”

“Who got it?”

“Some feller over yender behind the rise.”

“Well, jest tell me how you play the game and maybe I kin help you out.”

“You jest hang around here a spell, Jabez,” remarked Abel when Comrade Marsh had explained the shell game as it appeared to him, “and I’ll do some scoutin’ over yender.”

As he neared the crest of the hill that hid the confidence men, Abel slowed his gait and from time to time stopped to view the surrounding scenery. From the top of the rise he saw not far away a solitary individual puffing upon a big black cigar.

“I guess that’s the feller,” soliloquized Abel as he looked across the

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fair-grounds toward the blue mountains rising majestically beyond the town, and then up at the sky as if testing the weather, hoping thus not to arouse the suspicions of the stranger.

Abel absent-mindedly walked by him.

"I say, Cap," loudly remarked the stranger, "it's a fine day, ain't it?"

"Yep," replied Abel, slowly continuing on his way.

"Goin' to rain to-day, Cap?" asked the owner of the cigar.

"Looks as though it won't. Jest my luck, too. I bet a feller this mornin' that we'd git a wettin' afore dark, but I guess I ain't good on a bet to-day," remarked Abel, coming to a halt and saluting the stranger.

In the short interval of time that it took him to reply, the sergeant noted all the details of "Spike" Chandler's make-up. From the Alpine hat set far

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back upon his head to his dust-covered patent leather shoes, he was the typical confidence man. His was a clean shaven, florid face with a gracefully curling red mustache adorning his upper lip. He wore a bright red cravat in which sparkled an enormous diamond pin. His waistcoat was plaid and from pocket to pocket swung a ponderous gold chain. A gray checked suit completed his attire. But from behind all this gaudiness shone the quick, restless, steel-blue eyes of the shrewdest shell-game man in the country.

“So you’re a betting man, are you, Cap?”

“I useter bet a leetle when I was younger.”

“But you’re a bit of a sport yet, eh?”

“Well,” said Abel, “if you won’t let

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on to anybody, I'll tell you somethin'."

"Trust me, Cap," exclaimed
"Spike."

"Well, then," continued the sergeant drawing nearer, "I'm goin' to bet on Eph Lindsley's pacer this afternoon."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yep, I've got the money right here in my inside pocket."

"How big is your wad, Major?" asked the gambler casually, but his eyes glittered with rapacity.

"Nigh onto fifty dollars," was the confidential reply.

"Oh, that ain't much," the sharper said as though disdaining such a trifle. "I lose that much in two minutes playing my game."

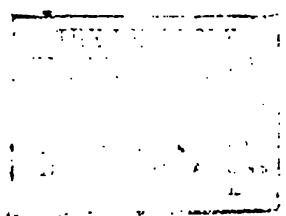
"What game's that?" asked the sergeant.

"This game here, Major. It's the



"It's the easiest game to win money on
there is."

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At the Fair

easiest game to win money on there is," was "Spike" Chandler's answer as he began setting up his paraphernalia. His outfit consisted of a tripod a little over three feet high, a small, square top, three half English-walnut shells, and a rubber ball, about the size of a pea.

"Under which shell is the ball, Major?" he asked as he deftly shifted the position of the three shells.

"By shote, that's easy. It's under this one," said the sergeant picking up one of the shells. There the ball lay.

"That's all there is to it, Colonel," said the light-fingered stranger as he rapidly manipulated the shells but in such a manner that the one covering the little rubber ball could be easily followed.

"Try it again, Colonel. Ha! Ha! you're a winner every time. Too bad

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you didn't have a fiver or a ten spot up then. You'd be making money fast."

"I've heard tell," the sergeant remarked thoughtfully, "that if a feller played a certain system, he'd sure win."

"What's the system, there's lots of them?" queried the unctious "Spike."

"Why, to keep doublin' your money every time," the sergeant replied.

"That's right, Colonel, you can't lose with that system, sure as God made little apples."

"Guess I'll try it on Eph's pacer this afternoon, then," was Abel's unexpected rejoinder.

"Don't be a fool and squander your money on an old plug. Here's your chance right here, Colonel," urged "Spike," "the last chance you'll get for I've got to be back in town by two on business."

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“How much kin I bet?” the sergeant asked as though taking the bait.

“Ten dollars. Twenty. Anything you want. I’ll bet you your whole fifty in one throw,” was the eager response.

While Abel seemed to be hesitating, a hitherto unnoticed gentleman stepped up to the pair.

“I’ll bet you five I can pick the winner,” he exclaimed.

“Go ahead,” said “Spike,” deftly mixing the shells but not so dexterously that the sergeant could not pick out the one covering the ball.

The new arrival raised the shell mentally chosen by the sergeant and exposed the little, black ball.

“That sure is easy,” exclaimed the accomplice as he pocketed his winnings. “Guess I’ll try a ten spot this time.”

As before the player raised the shell

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the sergeant had chosen and won his second bet.

“Come on, General,” said the newcomer, “try a tenner yourself. It’s a snap.”

“Well,” replied the sergeant timidly, “I’ll play a dollar if you’ll let me.”

“What the—! Well, go on, only you could be making ten just as easy.”

Laying down his dollar, the sergeant raised the shell that covered the ball.

“Kin I play some more?” asked Abel guilelessly.

“Sure, only make it worth while,” replied the manipulator of the shells.

“Put up ten or twenty,” whispered the other player into the ear of the hesitating sergeant. “It’s as easy as finding it in the dirt.”

“Guess I’ll play that system I was tellin’ my friend here about. He says

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it's all right," vouchsafed Abel withdrawing a few paces to unbutton his coat and fumbling a long time with what was presumably his large roll of bills.

Turning about he approached the table and hesitatingly laid down a two dollar bill.

"Will you let me double each bet?" he asked.

"Certainly, General, certainly. This is your day off. Do as you please. Here you go. Pick the easy winner," cried the confidence man shifting the shells about the board.

The sergeant did and thrusting the four dollars into one trouser pocket, he drew a five dollar bill from the other.

"Maybe he'll balk when we git to the twenty dollar ones," he remarked, placing it upon the table.

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“Not a bit of it,” answered the confederate. “Keep at him. You’ve got him on the run already, Cap.”

“Here you go, gents!” cried “Spike.” “Pick the winner every time. Only five dollars a throw. All prizes and no blanks. Ready now—go—!”

And Abel again won his wager.

Into the pocket with the former winnings went the ten dollars. From the other pocket the sergeant drew a ten dollar bill and laid it upon the table.

“Do you think he’ll stand twenty next time?” he whispered.

“Try him and see, Cap,” was the reply.

The sergeant played his ten and again the sharper allowed him to win.

“By shote, boys,” he exclaimed as he pocketed the money, “I clean fer-got I was invited to lunch at one o’clock

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and it must be nigh onto two. Guess I'll have to leave. So long." And the sergeant started away.

He merely started for scarcely had he uttered his farewell than both the rigger and the capper sprang upon him. In an instant Abel was on his back with "Shinner" Hook's fingers slowly shutting off his wind and "Spike" Chandler trying to locate his pockets beneath his long tailed coat. It looked as though his ruse was doomed to failure.

Suddenly a dark shadow loomed over the three men struggling on the ground. There was a resounding thud as a huge umbrella smashed "Shinner's" derby over his eyes. Almost at the same instant a hand seized "Spike" by the neck and threw him in a heap several yards away. Before he could recover, "Shinner" went sailing down upon him.

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When the two gamblers, their fluent cursing a credit to their profession, arose, they received a second shock.

There, at the side of the crestfallen sergeant, stood Eliza Morgan. Her antiquated hat was all awry, her face was flushed and her gray eyes snapping. One hand was firmly planted on her hip, arm akimbo, and in the other she grasped a sadly wrecked umbrella. Then she took Abel by the arm and smiled at the two discomfited sharers.

“Hain’t it too bad about my old umbrel’?” she said, turning to go and adding over her shoulder, “Come over to Hoss Hill some day and git woke up. Good-bye.”

“Well,” she said to Abel when they were quite out of earshot, “that’s a fine howdy-do, ain’t it? Fightin’ with two strangers whilst the lunch is waitin’ and I go lookin’ all over fer

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you worried most to death thinkin' you might be gittin' into trouble. And sure enough you be, too."

But the wily Abel answered never a word. In silence he trudged along and let the matron's excitement find an unobstructed outlet. By the time they reached the rest of the party her anger had subsided and the sergeant breathed a sigh of relief.

While the matron bustled about preparing the lunch, Abel sat under the tree—well on the off-side—that shaded the red table-cloth spread on the grass, and counted his money. The children were scattered about in groups enjoying every moment of the time, but Eliza's sharp eyes followed them and when they ventured too far a-field her shrill voice brought them back. Barney and Eph Lindsley were leaning against the wagon talking earnestly.

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“Eph,” Barney was saying as he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his flaming red hair, “I’m afther tellin’ yez that there ain’t another woman could run that Poorfarm like ‘Liza there. Begorra, it does me old heart good to see them childern enjoyin’ thimselves in spite of their misforchunes.—Yis, I know what Sam Canfield’s up to and it makes me blood bile when I’m afther thinkin’ of it. He do be needin’ somebody to put a crimp into him.”

“It’s jest as I was sayin’, Barney,” said Lindsley, his honest face clouded; “I ain’t worryin’ much about myself, it’s mostly fer ‘Liza and them childern up there at the Home. But,” he added, his natural optimism coming to the fore, “I don’t think Sam kin run this township much longer.”

“Well, Sam do be a mighty shrewd

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politician fer these parts, but jest the same he'd better not be afther tryin' any new thricks around here, because Barney Finnegin won't sit in his chair and smoke his pipe and do nothing. Niver a—”

“Child—dern! Ru—fus!” cried Eliza in a rising crescendo, interrupting them. “Come here! Lunch is ready. Abel, you set down there. Come on, folks, it's time to eat.”

As the meal was progressing, Abel caught sight of Jabez Marsh walking dolefully by.

“Come here, Jabez,” he shouted, “come here! You kin go to the encampment now. I skint them scallywags fer certain!”

Thrusting his hand deep into his trouser pocket, the sergeant withdrew a mass of crumpled bills and counted out twelve dollars.

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“There be yourn, Jabez. Set down now and have a bite.”

“Bless my patch, Abel Gulick,” exclaimed the matron, “what be the meanin’ of these goin’s on, anyway?”

With the drumstick of a chicken in one hand and a dill pickle in the other, the sergeant related between bites, his experience with the shell game men.

“Well, Abel Gulick, mebbe you think you’re smart, and mebbe you be, but I think you’re a big—well, anyway, I don’t think you’re so awful smart,” exclaimed the matron. “Howsomever, I’m glad Comrade Marsh kin go to the encampment.”

After the lunch had been disposed of, Mrs. Morgan took the children for a further tour of the grounds. The men strolled over to the race-track where Abel put five dollars up on “Shellbark.” His good fortune, or

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perhaps his good judgment, followed him. Lindsley's horse won in three straight heats and Abel added the money to his growing store.

“By shote!” he gleefully remarked to Eph on the way home, “to think that with my measly dollar I made enough to pay Jabez his twelve and have got eleven left.”

The wonderful holiday was over. The sun was setting behind the majestic Picatinny Mountains as the big carry-all rattled through the village street toward the Home. Once more the quietude of the place was broken by the shouts of the happy children and the martial strains of fife and drum, and in a few moments the occupants of the wagon dismounted at the gates of the Almshouse to the tune of “Home, Sweet Home.”

CHAPTER VIII

APPLEJACK AND LEMONADE

TOWARD the end of September the Township Committee assembled at the Home for its regular monthly meeting. Upon the neatly covered table stood, as was now customary, a large pitcher of lemonade and a plentiful supply of jumbles. When the roll was called every member responded to his name and the meeting began. Secretary Darby read the minutes and just as Chairman Lindsley was about to put the question of their adoption Abel Gulick arose quicker than he had ever risen before.

“By shote!” he exclaimed in a terrified voice, and ker-thumped from the room and out of the back door.

Applejack and Lemonade

“What in thunder ails Abel?” asked Amzi Messler of the matron. “Be he sufferin’ from the weather?”

Before Mrs. Morgan could answer, Amzi said something akin to “By hen!” and followed in the footsteps—or rather footstep—of the sergeant.

At almost the same instant the chairman excitedly exclaimed, “This meetin’ be adjourned to the krick!” And grasping his hat and coat in one hand and the pitcher of lemonade in the other, he followed his predecessors in flight.

The remaining members glanced out of the window and with various exclamations of fear and awe, they indiscriminately picked up hats and coats and rushed for the back door. Soon a file of Horse Hill’s most prominent citizens was tearing through the yard and dashing down the hill toward the

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creek, with Hiram Pierson clutching the dish of jumbles, and with yelping Lazarus bringing up the rear.

But Deacon Canfield remained behind, struggling to get into the only remaining coat, which happened to be Abner Darby's and was many sizes too small for him. Seam after seam of the garment gave way with a loud, tearing sound just as three fashionably gowned women appeared at the door.

Canfield murmured beneath his breath, "The County Aid Society."

Mrs. Morgan, with folded arms, stood near the table. The three ladies majestically swept into the room without the formality of knocking and through their lorgnettes surveyed the matron from head to foot.

"Matron Morgan, I presume?" said the leader in a condescending tone, when they had finished their inspection.

Applejack and Lemonade

“Yes, ‘Liza Morgan’s my name,’
replied the matron. “What’s yourn?”

The spokeswoman of the delegation opened a handbag, and drew out a card. Holding it gingerly between her thumb and index finger, the other fingers crooked at the proper angle, wrist and elbow fastidiously flexed, she handed it to Mrs. Morgan. The matron, fingers, wrist and elbow bent as ultra fastidiously as the caller’s, took the bit of pasteboard.

“‘Miss M. Evangelina Smythe,’ ”
she read aloud. “Be this Smith or
Smythe, Ma’am?”

“Why—er—it is usually pronounced
‘Smythe,’ ” was the answer.

“Well, Miss Smythe, what kin I do
fer you?” asked Mrs. Morgan.

“We three ladies constitute a sub-
committee, of which I have the honor
of being chairwoman, representing the

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County Female Charities Aid Society. We have been delegated to inspect the Poorhouse and to report to the Board at its regular meeting next week."

"We always be glad to have people come to the Home any time they see fit," said Mrs. Morgan politely, though she noted that the chairwoman had neglected to introduce her colleagues. "And we always be glad to show them around—"

"Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Matron," interrupted Miss Smythe, "but we would prefer looking about without undue interference or influence on the part of the officials of the Home. Would we not, ladies?"

The remainder of the committee unanimously affirmed their leader's statement.

"I notice, Mrs. Matron," continued Miss Smythe, "that the table is covered

Applejack and Lemonade

with a white cloth. Had you received any intimation of our visit?"

"That table be always kept covered by a white or a red cloth," replied Eliza. "Jest now the cloth happens to be white. If you want to see the other one, I'll show it to you."

And notwithstanding the exclamations of protest on the part of the committee, she folded up the snowy piece of linen and in its stead spread the colored one that usually covered the table between meals.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Matron," said one of the ladies, "but what has become of the whip that Mrs. Gulick formerly kept standing there in the corner?"

"That went towards makin' the fire fer the fust wash this here Home had in a pretty long spell, the week I took holt," was the rejoinder.

"Can you be so ignorant of the

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proper method of training these youthful paupers that you dispense with corporal punishment?" asked Miss Smythe in astonishment. "Why, when I was studying social problems at Vassar I learned never to spare the rod."

"Well, Miss Smythe, when you were at Vawsaw, I'm afeared was afore my time," retorted the calm but disgusted Matron.

"The i—dee—ah!" exclaimed the committee in unison.

"You'll excuse me now," Eliza said. "I've got a big family to care fer and that means workin'," and leaving the delegation in the dining-room, she repaired to the kitchen where she was soon busied preparing supper.

During this entire colloquy, Samuel Canfield had been a silent listener but as soon as Mrs. Morgan was safely out of sight he took occasion to inform the

Applejack and Lemonade

ladies that he fully coincided in their views on the subject of bringing up paupers. After a moment, however, the committee left him to make its inspection.

While the three representatives of the Aid Society were peering into rooms, closets and drawers, examining the beds in the dormitories and criticising anything and everything, and while the Deacon was patiently awaiting the return of the exploring expedition, the Township Committee held its adjourned meeting on the bank of the creek.

The terrified committeemen had safely arrived at their destination. Ephraim had spilled very little of the lemonade and the few jumbles that Hiram had dropped from time to time had been picked up by the members that followed him. After congratu-

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lating each other on their narrow escape, the meeting reconvened.

But Amzi Messler seemed to be uneasy. He frequently shifted his position on the coat upon which he was sitting as though something were troubling him. Finally he arose, picked up the garment and felt for the cause of his discomfort. From one of the pockets he withdrew a pint flask, contents unknown, but color promising.

“By hooky!” he exclaimed, holding the bottle up to the light, “if I hain’t got the Deacon’s pizen.”

“Open ‘er up, Amzi!” cried several of the members at once.

“I declare a recess of this meetin’ fer one half hour fer the purpose of openin’ up under good and welfare,” ordered the chairman, adding to the mirth and laughter of the committee-men.

Applejack and Lemonade

“It looks like ‘apple,’ ” said Amzi. Then drawing the cork, “It smells like ‘apple.’ ”

“And by heck! It’s Hank Tagger’s best!” he cried, tasting it.

“Mr. Chairman!” said Abel. “As this be a sociable meetin’ of gentlemen and not an official gatherin’, bein’s you called fer good and welfare, I allow I kin make a motion. Be I right?”

“You’re right, Abel, but if you want any of that ‘sour’ you’ve got to git a dipper fust,” replied the chairman.

“By shote! how’d you know I was goin’ to say put it in the lemonade?” asked the sergeant laughing.

“That’s easy, Abel. You looked at the bottle, you looked at the pitcher, you counted noses, you looked around fer a stick to stir it with and you looked around fer a dipper. But last and not least, it’s the best way to serve it.”

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“Hoorah fer Sherlock Holmes!” cried Abner Darby.

“Quiet, gentlemen,” cautioned Hiram Pierson, “or them old hens’ll come down to see what’s goin’ on.”

When the party had recovered from the fright caused by this remark, Amzi Messler carefully poured the contents of the flask into the pitcher.

“Guggles jest like ile, don’t it, Amzi?” remarked Eph Lindsley.

“It sure do, Eph. Sam allowed he’d never tech ‘apple’ if it weren’t at least ten year old. Jest watch the beads on it.”

“Abel,” said Eph, “you sneak up to the house and git that dipper whilst I cut a stick fer to stir this up with. Go easy-like and if you git pinched by the delegation throw ‘em off the scent. Don’t squeal, or you don’t git a drop!”

By the time Abel returned the mix-

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ture was ready for distribution. With many a laugh on the Deacon and many a jest at the expense of the delegation from the County Female Charities Aid Society, the pitcher was quickly emptied and the jumbles disposed of.

Rapping upon the bottom of the dipper with his ever-ready pipe, the chairman called the meeting from refreshments to labor.

“Boys,” he said, “as it’s gettin’ late and as a shower’s comin’ up all-fired black and quick, if some one’ll make a motion to git a cow fer the Home and raise ‘Liza Morgan’s salary to about seventy-five a year, we’ll adjourn.”

When the motion was passed the meeting adjourned and the members of the committee by wide detours safely reached their homes.

At the Almshouse, the ladies, having finished their inspection, were going

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down the path toward the road when Sam Canfield, forgetting that the coat he wore was rather *outré*, volunteered to drive them to the train. The invitation was accepted and the Deacon hurried home to hitch the roan to the family two-seater.

Within a quarter of an hour the party was on the way to the station, but just as they were approaching they saw the train roll away from the platform. Another was not due for several hours so Canfield gallantly offered to drive his charges to town. During the trip the Deacon was careful to tell the committee of the maladministration of affairs at the Home and of his plans for a shake-up in the spring. Between them they thoroughly libelled the Poor-house and all that was connected with it.

“When you git that report of yourn

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made out," said Sam Canfield with a chuckle, "send a copy of it to *The Banner* and I'll see that it gits printed. That'll show the people around here jest how things stand."

Suddenly in the midst of their conversation, the thunder-storm that had been hovering over the town broke. Long before the party reached a haven of refuge, the three women looked, as was later reported in the village, "like three old hens that had been fished out'n the krick."

The wetting received by these Samaritans tended not a little to make their opinion of the Home worse than before, if that were possible. They did not hesitate to express their feelings and the statement that they sent to the County Female Charities Aid Society was so scathing and showed such gross mismanagement of the township

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institution that the society unanimously endorsed the committee's recommendation to have the account published in *The Banner*.

The editor of that sheet was amazed at the condition of affairs as delineated in the report. Immediately upon its receipt he borrowed the letter-carrier's bicycle, hurried out to the Home and made a personal inspection. When the paper went to press the next day it contained an article on the management of the Horse Hill Poorfarm. It concluded with the information that never before in the history of that institution had its affairs been conducted so economically and so successfully, and that the boys and girls being reared within its walls would be a blessing to any home.

The Deacon was a surprised and infuriated mortal when the article came

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to his attention. No one realized better than he the set-back this would give his plans, and he cursed the editor deeply and fervidly. But the harm had been done and he knew that only by redoubled efforts could he counteract its influence.

CHAPTER IX

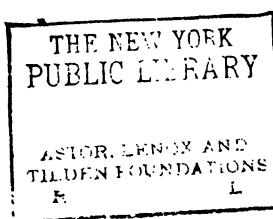
THE LITTLE SOAP-FAT MAN

EARLY one Saturday morning about the middle of October, Jerry McCracken might have been seen making his way along the winding road that led to town. Upon his arm, its contents hidden by many layers of newspapers, he carried an old worn-out market basket. The load was a heavy one and little Jerry found it necessary to rest at frequent intervals. Occasionally, as he trudged along, he was overtaken by some farmer driving in, but every proffer of a ride was thankfully declined, perhaps as much from a fear that some inquisitive person might pry into his basket as from any spirit of independence.



Jerry would play odds and ends of melodies.

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The Little Soap-fat Man

Often during his stops, particularly if he found himself under some gorgeously tinted tree or upon an unusually inviting bank, Jerry would draw his fife from beneath the upper layer of paper in the basket and play a few strains—odds and ends of melodies that entered his mind. Sometimes he would play some favorite tune over and over again. During one of his resting spells he was playing a medley. Suddenly he struck up a weird, plaintive melody that rose and fell like the southing of the winds; now whistling over barren wastes; now sobbing and moaning as through the dank branches of many pines; now wailing close by, then dying, fainter and fainter, beyond the distant hills. As the last, faint notes seemed to follow after the lingering echoes, floating away to the hazy verge beyond, a strange, far-away ex-

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pression filled the eyes of the lad and overspread his face.

“I wonder what that song means?” he murmured to himself as he slowly arose.

At last he reached the outskirts of the town and crossing the bridge over the Whippanny River, he turned into the well-worn foot path skirting the stream. No lark sang more merrily than Jerry whistled that morning as he walked along the brook. He did not hear the chirp of the cricket, nor the croak of the belated frog beside the bank. He did not see the black bass leaping in rift and pool. He did not notice the autumn foliage adorning the shores of the stream with tints of gold and bronze and crimson. He thought of but one thing—he was conscious of but one object—he saw but one face beaming over a beautiful—

The Little Soap-fat Man

“There it is!” suddenly exclaimed the boy as the sight of Tompkin’s soap factory rudely broke in upon his reveries.

Passing through the yard, Jerry came to the large, open door of the works where he saw a young man cutting soap into bars.

“Do you want any soap fat, Mister?” asked Jerry, walking up to the workman.

The young man looked up at the little fellow with a smile.

“Go over to the office there, Shorty, and ask Mr. Tompkins, the boss,” he said.

Jerry knocked at the office door and was told to come in.

He entered and deposited his basket upon the floor.

“Do you want to buy any soap fat, Mister?” he asked again.

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“The market is a bit overstocked just now, Sonny. How many tons have you?” inquired Mr. Tompkins with a genial smile.

“No tons, Mister, only what I’ve got in my basket,” replied the cripple.

“How much do you want for it, sir?” queried the amused soap maker.

“What do you pay?” parried Jerry.

“The market price is now two cents a pound,” quoted the proprietor solemnly.

“Well, then I’ll ask you that price,” replied the boy.

“All right, my son, have the young man outside weigh it and come back to the office.”

The weight was twenty pounds; and the soap manufacturer counted into Jerry’s hand the largest fortune he had ever possessed. Forty cents and all his! His brown eyes shone and

The Little Soap-fat Man

sparkled with delight. When the kindly Mr. Tompkins noted the pleasure that beamed in the child's face, he called to the workman cutting the soap:

"Tom, buy all the fat this young man brings here. Pay him two cents a pound cash—not in soap—and be sure that the scales are right. Do you hear—see that the scales are right—for him."

"Thank you, sir," said Jerry, and with a shake of the hand, a pat on the back and a "Good-bye, Sonny, come again," from the soap maker, the boy left the office.

He hurried out of the yard, walked back along the path by the river and took the road leading into town. When he reached the town itself, with his forty cents tightly clutched in his pocket, Jerry wandered from store to

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store critically eying the contents of the windows. At last he paused before a book-shop. After gazing wistfully at the many beautiful volumes on display, he finally mustered up courage, pressed the latch and walked in.

“Well, my boy, what do you want?” asked the elderly proprietor.

“Please, sir, I want to ask you a few questions,” replied Jerry, his basket on his arm, his little fortune clasped in his hand.

“All right, young man, tell me what you wish.”

Jerry and Mr. Runnell, the bookseller, had a private interview lasting about ten minutes.

“Here’s forty cents, sir,” said Jerry as he arose to leave.

“Bless you, my boy, keep them till you come for it. I shall endeavor to get the best discount and you shall

The Little Soap-fat Man

have the entire benefit of it. No, sir, I ask a deposit only from customers whom I do not know very well," remarked the benevolent Mr. Runnell.

"But you don't know me very well," objected Jerry.

"Yes, sir, I do. I have known you at least ten minutes," replied Mr. Runnell, the twinkle in his eyes bellying his serious expression.

"But you said it was your rule to ask all customers for deposits with their orders, and I—I won't like it if you don't take mine," persisted the little soap-fat man.

"Well, if you insist, my boy, I will. What did you say your name was? Jerry McCracken?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Jerry, here is a receipt then. I'll do the very best I can for you. Good-bye, my boy."

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From the bookstore, Jerry hastened home.

“Oh, Mrs. Morgan!” cried the delighted boy as he entered the kitchen, “just think, Mister Tompkins is going to give me two cents a pound for all the fat I bring him!”

Then, his eyes aglow with happiness, his voice tremulous with the joy of anticipation, he tiptoed over to the matron and whispered in her ear, “And when I get money enough I’m going to buy a book that comes just for blind people and give it to Marion for Christmas! Won’t that be fine?”

Eliza’s tender heart was touched by little Jerry’s unconscious altruism. For a moment she was unable to speak —she feared her voice would break— so she drew the child to her in a close embrace.

“Jerry, Jerry,” she finally said, the

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glint of a tear in her eye, "what would we do without you!"

From that time on it was really surprising how much fat found its way into the pail.

"But bless my patch!" Eliza said to herself, "I'll save on somethin' else to make up fer them drippin's."

That same day after dinner, Jerry paid a visit to Finnegin's Inn. Boldly opening the door, he found Barney in the outer room of the establishment sound asleep as was evidenced by his rafter-shaking snores. Closing the door with intentional force, Jerry stepped in upon the saw-dust covered floor just as the landlord awoke with a start.

"Well, sir, what kin I be afther doin' fer yez?" asked Finnegin.

"Please, Mr. Finnegin, I came over to ask if you will give me your fat."

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“Give yez me fat! Give yez me fat! Why, me lad, I do be afther wantin’ me fat fer mesilf. Sure, I need it to keep me ould bones warrum wid. But what would yez be doin’ wid me fat, anyway, me ladda-buck?”

“I don’t want *your* fat, Mr. Finnegin. I only want the fat you throw away from the kitchen,” replied the grinning Jerry.

“The devil take me, but what would yez be doin’ wid that fat, Jerry?”

“I’m in the soap-fat business, Mr. Finnegin, and every Saturday morning I go to town with a load of it and sell it at the soap factory,” gravely replied Jerry.

“And how much do yez git fer it?” queried Barney.

“Two cents a pound, sir.”

“Two cints a pound? If I give yez fifteen pounds a week, how much would

The Little Soap-fat Man

that be afther fetching yez, me boy?"

Jerry dropped upon his knees and with his fingers traced the sum in the sawdust on the floor.

"Thirty cents, sir," was the answer.

"Your right, me lad. Yez kin come every Saturday mornin' and yez'll find a tub in the back yard wid all the fat in it that Finnegin's Inn kin projuce. Do yez think yez kin carry it all?"

"I'm going to make a wagon out of a soap-box."

"Yer a fine lad, Jerry McCracken, and it's the likes of yez what made this grand and glorious counthry what it is. Yis, sir, Jerry, from the days of Andy Jackson right down along the line till now all av our great men had their start about like yez.

"Only be careful av one thing, Jerry," continued Barney, gravely, "niver jine the fat trusts in Wall

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Street who do be tryin' and renderin' our bones and tallow into soft-soap to grease their way easy-like into Heaven.”

With this bit of advice Barney bade the boy good-bye.

“A fine lad, a fine lad he is!” soliloquized Barney as he watched Jerry walk toward the door. Then he called after him, “Give me compliments to Mother Morgan!”

The child turned.

“She kissed me good-bye this morning,” he said shyly, and went out.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS AT THE HOME

“ **A** BEL GULICK,” meditatively remarked Eliza to the superintendent one evening about a week before Christmas. They were seated in the kitchen, one at either end of the stove. The matron was darning stockings and the sergeant reading the advertisements in that week’s issue of *The Banner*,—“I’ve been thinkin’ pretty nigh onto all week as how we ought to git up a leetle Christmas party fer the children, seein’ as how they never yet had anything like it in their hull lives afore. I’ve got a few shillin’s to spare and as we needn’t have nothin’ extravagant I allow we could give ’em a fine surprise without

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bankruptin' ourselves. What do you think of it yourself?"

Slowly laying his paper down upon the floor, Abel pushed his silver-bowed spectacles far up on his bald head.

"Well, 'Liza, as the only kicker what ever sot on the Township Committee is goin' to be chairman next year and me and you git the bounce—leastwise you—I guess we had better do it now or never. Yep, we kin do it all right. I've got a couple of shillin's I kin chip in myself."

"I think so, Abel. You kin git a fair-sized tree up yender in the pines. I'll go to town and git sech nicnacs as come fer the purpose, and we kin trim up the tree the night afore Christmas when the childern be in bed and give 'em a genuine surprise in the mornin'. Of course, we can't afford to give 'em grand presents, but then the leetle we

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kin do will be more than they ever had afore. I'm sure they'll be better and happier fer it."

The sergeant arose, slowly ker-thumped up and down the kitchen floor a few times and stopped to poke the fire.

"We'll do it, 'Liza. I'll git the tree when the kids be to school and hide it in the cellar. How come you to think of it anyway?"

"I don't know as I be tellin' anything I ought not to, Abel, but Jerry's savin' the pennies what he's gittin' fer the soap-fat and he's goin' to git somethin' fer Marion's Christmas. When he told me I allowed we'd surprise the hull lot of them."

Abel resumed his "shin-toast," as he called it, before the fire.

"'Liza Morgan, you should have had childern of your own."

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“The Lord willed otherwise, Abel,” replied the matron after a pause long enough to darn a big hole in the toe of a stocking. “If I had had any of my own, mebbe I wouldn’t be here to-night and mebbe some one better’n me would a been in my place.”

“Mebbe, ’Liza, mebbe, but I’m a-thinkin’ that we could scratch all Hoss Hill with a fine-tooth comb and not git a matron what’s got the welfare of them childern so to heart as you have.”

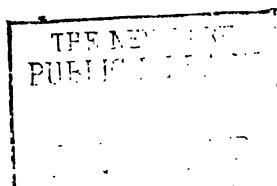
Eliza did not answer, but wiping a bit of moisture from the corner of her eye, she again took up her darning. Abel lifted his paper from the floor and began reading the obituary column. After a time Eliza dropped her work into her lap.

“Abel,” she began, “I have a notion that if we asked Eph Lindsley to come



Gazing longingly into the window.

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over and play Santa Claus mebbe he'd do it."

"By shote! 'Liza, I guess he would."

The time before the Yuletide holidays passed quickly. On the day before Christmas Sergeant Gulick shouldered his axe, trudged through the snow to a distant clump of pines and felled the one best suited for a Christmas tree. Fastening a rope around the butt, he hauled it to the Home and hid it in a dark corner of the cellar where it would be free from prying eyes.

The day was a busy one for Eliza as well. She bustled about the Home preparing for the coming celebration. In the afternoon she hurried to the village to do some shopping that had been left for the last moment. As she passed down the street she found Rufus gazing longingly into the win-

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dow of Hiram Pierson's general store. A red tippet was wrapped several times around the darkie's neck, his cap was pulled well over his ears, his mittens, attached to a piece of braid slung over his shoulders, dangled down in front. In one hand he held an empty tomato can, in the other, one end of about five yards of assorted bits of rope tied together with many and divers knots. At the other end of the rope, securely fastened with many more knots, was yellow Lazarus.

“Why, Rufus,” called the matron to the deeply engrossed little darkie, “what be you doin' here?”

“Ah—Ah'se only lookin' in de winder.”

“Ain't there no school this afternoon, Rufus?”

“Ah—Ah don't know, m'am.”

“You don't know?”

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“Ah—Ah believe der ain’t.”

“Where be those childern goin’, Rufus?” asked Eliza, pointing to the boys and girls wending their way schoolward.

“What chillun?” asked Rufus, gazing about innocently.

“Why those childern goin’ toward the school?”

“What—what school?”

“Your school, of course,” answered the matron curtly.

“Mah school?” was the guileless reply.

“Rufus,” said the matron sternly, “you know very well it’s time you were in school. Jest hurry right along now or you’ll be late.”

“Ah guess der am school dis afternoon,” replied Rufus sorrowfully, shifting his position to the other flat foot. “Ah guess Ah’se goin’ too.”

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As he made a half-hearted effort to go, he took one more look in the window. Before he could move again Eliza gently laid her hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"What is it you want in there, Snowdrop?" she asked.

Rufus rolled his eyes more widely than before, and a grin spread from ear to ear showing every white tooth.

"Dat yah dawg collah dah. Dat yah collah wid de big brass nails on it an' de dandy chain," he replied.

"So you'd like to have that collar and chain?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

"Golly, Miss Mohgan," the pickaninny replied, his eyes fixed wistfully upon the matron, his dusky face wreathed in a smile, "ef Ah had dat yah collah an' chain Ah'd be de happiest niggah in de place. Golly, Ah'd be so proud ob mah dawg an' him col-

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lah dat Ah'd go Souf wid 'em bof in de spring-time."

"If you be a good boy, Rufus, perhaps Santa Claus will bring you a collar like that."

"No, Miss' Mohgan, little cullud chillun don't git nuffin'. Sandy Clusses only come to white chilluns."

"Mebbe he will, though, if you be good till Christmas."

"Ah'se goin'—to school—now, it's late," said Snowdrop in reply.

He shambled off and the rope he still held suddenly grew taut as it felt the weight of the motionless Lazarus. Rufus stopped. Lazily he turned around to see the cause of the trouble and then calmly waited for the mongrel to rise.

"Rufus," asked Mrs. Morgan, "what be you goin' to do with the tin can?"

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“Ah’se goin’ to cut a star fer a badge out’n it.”

“How about Lazarus while you be in school?”

“Ah’se goin’ to tie him out doors till school’s out,” replied Rufus intermittently pulling on the leash.

“Jest give me the rope and I’ll take him home. You hurry on,” said Eliza as the school bell sounded.

That same afternoon Jerry put all his soap fat in his little cart and set out for town, the happiest youngster in Horse Hill. After disposing of his stock and wishing Mr. Tompkins and Tom a Merry Christmas, he hastened to the bookstore. There he made his final payment and received the parcel he had so anxiously waited for.

The clouds had been hanging heavy in the sky all day, and now, as Jerry was leaving town, a fine drizzle set in.

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Under ordinary circumstances the boy would not have minded a bit of rain, but at this particular time he carried a very precious burden that he dared not expose to the wet.

As he approached the railroad crossing he espied Samuel Canfield drawing near, homeward bound. Allowing his fears for the safety of his treasure to overcome his usual independence, Jerry accosted the Deacon.

“Will you please give me a hitch, Mr. Canfield?” he asked.

“Who be you?” growled the Deacon, pulling up his team with a vicious jerk.

“I’m Jerry McCracken, sir,” replied the boy.

“One of them Poorhouse trash, hain’t you?”

“One of the orphans at the Home, yes, sir,” was Jerry’s reply.

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“Orphans, nothin’. You’re one of them paupers what’s gittin’ so danged high-toned sence you don’t wear stripes that you stop your betters along the public highway and act as if you were as good as the best of us. Git out of my sight, you beggar!”

With his last words the Deacon slashed down at the boy with his black-snake whip, but Jerry, nimble in spite of his deformity, sprang out from under the blow.

Covering his treasure with the papers he had left in his wagon, Jerry followed after the rapidly disappearing sleigh and hastened toward Horse Hill. As he neared the village the drizzle turned into rain and sleet. Fearful lest his prize become wet, the boy took off his coat and wrapped it tenderly about the object of his anxiety. By the time he reached the

Christmas at the Home

Home, poor Jerry was overcome from the exposure—but he had kept the precious book from harm.

Under the matron's skillful questioning the story of the Deacon's brutal behavior was disclosed. Her indignation was unbounded, and perhaps for the first time in her life she could find no words to express adequately her feelings. Abel was for marching straight up to the Deacon's home and thrashing that worthy individual to within an inch of his life. But saner second thought convinced the sergeant that such procedure would not only be unchristianlike but also somewhat inexpedient.

After a dose of steaming catnip tea and a thorough rubdown with warm goose-grease Jerry was put to bed and the matron's fears for his welfare were somewhat allayed. But all

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through the rest of the day and even while she and Abel trimmed the tree and made the final preparations for the morrow, her ire smouldered. It took the joy of Christmas day itself to dispel her anger.

And a glorious Christmas day it was. The morning dawned bright and cold. Clear as crystal seemed the air. Each window pane was covered with a fairy lace of frost. Great icicles hung from eave and window-sill where the rain and sleet of the day before had frozen with the increasing cold, while from ice and snow-covered tree and bush and field the sun flashed brilliantly.

Consumed with curiosity, the children hurried through their breakfast. They were eager to discover what was hidden behind the curtains draped in the dining-room and to solve the air of secrecy and of importance that en-

Christmas at the Home

veloped the matron and the superintendent.

After a feverish wait the youngsters were finally admitted to the room. Marshalled by the sergeant into proper order, they marched to their seats. At one end of the semi-circle Eliza seated herself, at the other end sat Abel, while Marion took her place near the melodeon, a wedding gift from Bill Cole that Mrs. Morgan had brought to the Home.

Soon the tinkle of a bell was heard, the curtains were drawn and lo! there stood the most wonderful Christmas tree ever beheld by human eye — or at least so thought the children of the Home. Then from a recess back of the curtains stepped Santa Claus himself. He was the conventionally red-nosed, bewhiskered, fur-trimmed old gentleman, but a gasp of astonishment

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and awe greeted him. It was his first appearance in the lives of the little orphans.

The wondrous figure raised his hands for silence. In a few, well-chosen words he told the children how he always rewarded the good and obedient. Then, from a table near the tree, he took up a written list and called off the names of the children. As they stepped forward he presented each one with some suitable gift.

When Jerry's name was called, the little cripple hopped nimbly to where Santa Claus was standing. With a flush of pleasure on his mobile face he received a beautiful rose-wood fife with silver tips. Before he reached his seat he was playing the last strains of the chorus of "Marching Through Georgia" to the great disgust of the sergeant and the amusement of those

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who remembered the scene at the cemetery.

Then Rufus heard his name called. The little darkie slowly arose, gazed about him for a moment bewildered, and then, his knock-knees converging a little closer than usual, he ambled up to the good patron Saint. In his package was the very collar and chain he had admired so much the day before.

Rufus seemed unable to realize that the collar was really his. Then suddenly a broad grin overspread his face, and hugging his gift tightly in both arms he rolled his eyes up to meet those of the red-nosed gentleman towering above him.

“Thank you, Mistah Sandy Clause, Ah’se sure Lazarus will ‘preciate it,” he said.

Still grinning he shuffled back to his

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seat whence an occasional scramble of paws and a fiercely whispered "Lie down, yo' Lazarus" seemed to indicate that the dog did not take as kindly to that gloriously studded collar as did his master.

"Sergeant Abel Gulick!" called Santa Claus.

Giving one of his most exquisite salutes, the sergeant advanced and received a long, heavy package. He opened it and disclosed a new, brightly varnished peg-leg. On the card he read "Merry Christmas from Eliza Morgan."

The embarrassed sergeant tried to thank the blushing widow for her unexpected but welcome gift. Words failing him he took his seat and critically examined the straps, rubber tip and other improvements on the limb.

"Mrs. Eliza Morgan!" The sur
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prised matron curtsied, and received a package that contained, to the delight of all, an immaculate wig, shaped like the patch she was then wearing. The new patch, however, was of the exact shade of grey to match her hair and not like the flaming adornment so long the distinguishing mark of Eliza's head. The confused matron admiringly turned it about and then read from the appended card, "Merry Christmas from Abel Gulick."

"Bless my—my *new* patch, Abel, but ain't it a beauty! How did you ever match it?" she exclaimed as she dexterously removed the old wig and covered the bald spot with the new.

"Well, 'Liza, I seen some long-like gray hair in the wood-box the other day. As mine be short and none of the childern's be gray, I allowed they must be yourn and so I sent 'em to town fer

The Home Rule of Eliza

a sample," the sergeant proudly explained.

"Well, bless my new patch, if you ain't the smartest man in Hoss Hill, Abel Gulick," exclaimed Eliza.

"Thank you, 'Liza Gu— 'Liza Morgan," stammered the embarrassed, but delighted sergeant.

"'Eph Lindsley! Well bless my heart, if that don't beat all!" cried Santa Claus as he picked up another package and turned it over and over. "As Eph ain't here I guess I'll see what it is."

Taking off the paper he held up before his delighted audience a corn-cob pipe.

Only one present remained now. As Santa Claus raised the large, flat package from the table every eye was fixed upon it. The children turned and twisted in their chairs to get a better

Christmas at the Home

view. All but Jerry McCracken who, his eyes brighter than usual, his breath coming a little quicker and hotter, leaned far forward in feverish expectancy.

Santa Claus walked out toward the circle of children. In a low, gentle tone he called, "Merry Christmas to Marion from Jerry."

Marion, smiling as only an extremely happy child can smile, took the parcel and opened it. In it was a beautifully bound book with the letters of the alphabet, the words of the primer, and the objects denoted by the words in raised type and characters. As Marion's fingers ran lightly over the pages, she smiled sweetly toward Jerry.

"Thank you so much, Jerry," she said in her tender voice. "Now you can tell me all about these instead of making letters and animals out of clay."

The Home Rule of Eliza

If the gates of heaven are opened by kind and unselfish thoughts then surely those two unfortunate children held the keys in their hands. Happiness shone from their faces as each thought of the pleasure of the other. It seemed as though all except Marion and Jerry themselves sensed some faint note of the future. Then Santa Claus huskily cleared his throat.

“Well, children,” he said, “I’ll have to go now and visit all the other little boys and girls. Good-bye, and a Merry Christmas to all of you!”

Instantly pandemonium broke loose. With shouts and laughter the children tumbled over each other in their eagerness to examine more closely all the rare good things that blessed fairy and idol of childhood had brought them.

Then someone was heard knocking loudly on the outside door. Behind

Christmas at the Home

the draught of cold air that rushed into the house came Ephraim Lindsley, strangely warm for such a day and smoking a brand new corn-cob pipe. With many a sly wink at Eliza and Abel, he listened to the chatter of the children as they crowded around him, tugging at coat tail or sleeve, telling him of the kindly visitor who had just left.

That night as Eliza lay in her bed she was blessed in the knowledge that she had brought joy and happiness to many little hearts that day. And she wondered why so many men and women with wealth at their command gave no thought or heed to the needy unfortunates about them, to the poor, forgotten, buffeted bits of flotsam tossing to and fro upon the cruel, merciless sea of Life.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHIP IS COME FOR ME TO-NIGHT

THE next day the merry-making at the Home continued. One sound, however, was missing. It was Jerry's shrill-sounding fife. The other children had arisen earlier than usual but Jerry asked to be allowed to remain in bed. As he moved restlessly about he continually asked for water, but it seemed that his thirst could scarcely be assuaged.

Under Eliza's tender ministrations the little patient's spirits rose, and by ten o'clock he was up and trying to enjoy the beauties of the day. But the only thing that seemed to interest him and that made him forget his dull aches for a moment was to see the exquisite

The Ship Is Come for Me To-night

pleasure that Marion derived from her book. It never left her hands. At every new character that sent its message through her fingers to her active mind, her face lighted up with happiness. Now and then she would come to Jerry and ask him to explain a letter or describe a picture, but when she heard his labored breathing she would close her book softly and say, "Never mind now, Jerry. To-morrow when you feel better you can tell me all about them."

Sometimes Jerry picked up his new fife and played a few, tentative notes only to lay it down again with a quizzical smile. Then, leaning his head upon his hands or upon the back of his chair, he would watch the other children at their play.

During the day, despite Eliza's utmost efforts to relieve him, Jerry grew

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worse. By evening his condition was so critical that the old village doctor was sent for. He came and carefully examined the boy as he feverishly tossed about on his bed. Then he rose, gravely shook his head and said, “ ‘Liza, it’s a bad case of pneumonia, brought on by exposure I guess.’ ” From behind his heavy glasses a kindly pair of gray eyes peered. “Was he out in that bad weather the other day?”

Though Eliza had tried not to believe that Jerry’s illness was more than a passing indisposition, yet in her heart she had been afraid. Now her worst fears were confirmed. She could not bar out the sight of Jerry as, trembling and exhausted, he stumbled into the kitchen the day before Christmas. The anger she had felt as she had listened to his story flamed up

The Ship Is Come for Me To-night

anew. Her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved. "He did it!" she muttered beneath her breath. Doctor Beers looked at her in amazement.

"Doc Beers," she cried, unable to remain silent any longer, "I've always been a Christian-like woman, but sometimes—sometimes— Why, of all the inhuman, vile critters that God ever allowed to crawl on this earth, Sam—" But her lips tightened in a grim, straight line. With an effort she controlled herself and said calmly, "Yes, Doc, you be right. Jerry did git a wettin' the other day. I guess that's what's the matter."

With a few words of comfort and instruction, the old physician left, and Eliza, neglecting all other duties, took her place at the side of the sick-bed. She was indefatigable. She scarcely allowed herself a moment for food or

The Home Rule of Eliza

rest. It was only when Jerry fell into a fitful doze that she hurried to the kitchen to swallow a cup of coffee or a bite to eat.

Upon Abel fell the task of managing the Home and caring for the children. How well his duties were performed is a matter for conjecture, but that they were undertaken cheerfully and willingly there is no doubt. For the sake of the boy who lay upstairs consumed with fever, the sergeant would have attempted a far more irksome task.

A day or so after the beginning of Jerry's illness, Abel sat before the kitchen stove with his feet on the oven rail, smoking his pipe. As he sat blowing hazy wreaths of smoke around the chimney, Eliza entered for one of her momentary breathing spells. While she poured herself a cup of coffee from the pot that stood sim-

The Ship Is Come for Me To-night

mering on the back of the stove, Abel hitched his chair around a little and placed his pipe upon the lid of the wood-box.

“ ‘Liza,’ he said, “I’ve been settin’ here thinkin’ about little Jerry upstairs. It don’t seem right that a happy, cheerful little feller like him should be took sick like that.”

Eliza, sipping her coffee and munching a piece of bread, nodded affirmation.

“And besides,” the sergeant continued, “if anything should happen to him who could I git to play the fife in the corps. There ain’t nobody what would ever be as good as Jerry. And why’s he sick?” Abel asked bringing his fist down upon his knee. “It’s all on account of Sam Canfield jest as me and you have said afore.”

At the mention of the Deacon’s

The Home Rule of Eliza

name, Eliza set her cup down with such emphasis that its contents spattered in every direction.

“That’s jest it, Abel Gulick!” she exclaimed, the strain through which she had passed during the day showing itself in her flushed face and rising voice. “That’s jest it! And let me tell you one thing—if Jerry don’t git well there’s goin’ to be some mighty high goin’s on around Hoss Hill.”

She rose from her chair in her excitement and Abel instinctively threw his arm up and shielded his head; it was a habit he had acquired under the tutelage of the late Ann Gulick.

“Yes, sir!” Eliza continued, “I’ll go around to every house in this here township and tell ‘em what a mean, contemptible critter Sam Canfield be.”

“That’s right, ‘Liza, and I’ll help you too.”

The Ship Is Come for Me To-night

“I’ll spoil his plans fer a change in the runnin’ of this here Home if I have to git out and stump the hull town-ship,” she said without noticing his interruption.

“But, ‘Liza,” interjected Abel, “Sam’s got money and he kin buy up all the floaters fer the election this spring.”

“Well,” Eliza retorted, “he can’t buy up everybody. There be some men livin’ around here what’ll help fight him. Yes, sir, if anything happens to Jerry I’m agoin’ straight up to Eph Lindsley, and me and him will make Sam’s campaign jest naturally dry up and wilt!”

“Mebbe, ‘Liza, mebbe,” was the sergeant’s dubious reply.

But Eliza had subsided. Her pent-up emotions had found a vent and she felt greatly relieved. Leaving Abel to

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ruminate over her words, she returned to the sick-room.

On the evening of the fourth day the crisis occurred and Doctor Beers was hastily summoned. The kindly physician could do nothing. As hour after hour went by Jerry steadily sank. Toward morning the brave, uncomplaining boy asked for his fife. He took it tenderly from Abel's hands, looked at it lovingly for a moment and then tried to play. But so dry were his lips and so labored his breathing that he could scarcely sound a note. Finally he gave up the attempt and asked Mrs. Morgan to call Marion to the bed-side.

When the blind girl arrived, Jerry's face lighted up.

"Marion," he said gently, "when I am—well again, I am going—to sell all the soap-fat—I can get—" he was

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obliged to rest. "And when I—have saved enough—money," he stopped again for a moment and then struggled on. "I am—going to send you—to a hospital where—they will make you see."

"Thank you, Jerry," Marion replied hardly above a whisper, "only now you must get well."

After a long wait—it seemed doubly long to those about the bed-side, Jerry faintly asked, "Marion, will—you—please—sing—to—me?"

"What shall I sing, Jerry?"

"Sing — that — song — you — you always liked so—much, Marion, that—strange—song."

And so Marion sang her throbbing song again. More sweetly than ever before flowed the words from her young lips and filled the room with their wondrous music:

The Home Rule of Eliza

“He gave his heart to me, his Love,—
Before they bore him o'er the Sea,
He gave his heart, his all, to me
To keep till the eve of Eternity.

“Through the live-long day, and the long, long night,
I watch on the sands by an empty Tomb,
Nor mind the breakers’ roar and boom,
Nor the lightning’s flash in the falling gloom.

“One moan is mine; one song I sing;
And oft as the whistling winds go by
They carry them on to the fading sky—
A moan and a song that shall never die.

“Lo! A crimson moon creeps o'er the verge;
She throws her every blood-red bar
Athwart the rays of each separate star
That shines but to faint in the skies afar.

“And a Ship comes in on the crimson tide;
Her sheeny sails are silvery white;
(But in sable is her hull bedight)
And the Ship is come for me to-night.”

Unconsciously their little hands met
in a tender clasp. And as the last,
weird notes died away, Jerry raised
himself up, took Marion’s cold, pale
face between his hot, feverish palms
and kissed her upon the forehead.

The Ship Is Come for Me To-night

“I know now what that song means, Marion,” he murmured. So still did he lie it seemed as though his soul had already flown. Then his lips moved. Eliza bent down to catch the sound.

“Mrs. Morgan,” he whispered, “won’t you kiss me good-bye again?”

With a sob, Eliza gathered the boy in her arms. Then, as she slowly laid him back upon his pillow, pain and sorrow forever fled from the face of the little cripple and in their place stole slowly a smile and a look of serene joy and peace.

CHAPTER XII

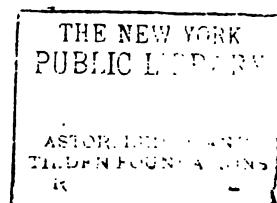
BARNEY FINNEGIN MAKES A CALL

THE snow had been falling steadily since early morning, piling drift upon drift in every hollow and against every bank. Finnegin's Inn stood at the side of the road, a white-capped sentinel ready to challenge the intrepid traveller abroad despite the blinding storm. Within the tavern sat Barney, his feet cocked up against the big, pot-bellied stove, smoking his ever-present pipe. No patron came to disturb the cogitations of the Boniface and the fire in the stove burned low and the pipe in his hand grew cold.

Several weeks after Jerry's death, Eliza, true to her resolve, had gone to Ephraim Lindsley to enlist the serv-



His meditations carried him back before
Eliza Morgan's advent.



Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

ices of the bluff, good-hearted bachelor in her campaign against the boss of Horse Hill. It was this that filled the tavern keeper's thoughts, for Eph, mindful that Barney at the fair had forcibly expressed his opinion of the Deacon, had turned to him for counsel.

His meditations carried him back before Eliza Morgan's advent at the Home, and his honest soul waxed wroth at Canfield's determination to restore things to their old order. At last he realized that he had a mission to perform. Looking out in the direction of the Poorhouse, he slapped his thigh with a resounding whack and exclaimed, "Bedad, I'll go up this minute and tell her!"

With Finnegin, to decide was to act. He got up from his chair, replenished the fire, fastened the windows, put on his fur cap, tucked his trousers into

The Home Rule of Eliza

his boots and drew on his overcoat. With his hands deep in his pockets and his cap pulled low over his face, he trudged down the hill and over the bridge to the Home. By the time he had scraped the balled snow from his heels, the matron had answered his knock.

“Good afternoon—Jest wait on the porch whilst I git a broom,” was Eliza’s greeting as she beheld the snow-covered figure. In a moment she returned.

“Hello!” Barney had barely time to say when the broom was put into violent operation. With two or three lusty strokes the whole portly front of mine host was swept clean—and his breath almost knocked out.

“Snowin’ kinder hard. Turn around,” said Eliza and three more strokes finished the back.

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

"I guess that'll do," she said.
"Come in."

"Thank yez, I will," said Barney. Then he kicked the toe of each boot against the door jam and entered. "Yez went afther me so briggady wid yer broom I hadn't time to bid yez the top o' the day."

As Barney took the proffered chair Abel entered the room.

"Hello, Barney," he called, "I see you comin' up and thought you'd come around to the kitchen door."

"Abel Gulick," Eliza remonstrated, "how many times must I tell you that no more company be goin' to the back door? I expect them all to walk right up to the porch and come in the front way." Turning to Barney she volunteered, "The other day he took the dominie around by the kitchen way."

"Every one be the front door but

The Home Rule of Eliza

Sam Canfield," laughed Finnegin.

"Say, Barney," Mrs. Morgan said confidentially, a mischievous twinkle in her eye, "I bought a new mud-scraper and mat fer the kitchen door sence the last meetin'."

"Be gorra, that's fine, 'Liza," Barney shouted with a hearty guffaw. "Sam'll have to come in be the window or the chimney the next time, or stay out."

"No, no," he continued, motioning deprecatingly toward Abel who was approaching with a pitcher of cider and a bowl of jumbles, "I come up on business and not fer a party."

"It may be the last chanct to have one with me and Abel up here," smiled the matron.

"I guess I won't neglect me last opportunity, then," was Barney's reply. Raising his glass, he said,

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

“Here’s to a successful trip to New York fer Abel!”

“What!” exclaimed the superintendent and the matron in unison.

“Sure and I’m afther organizing a little excursion to New York fer Abel here.” Barney grinned broadly at the astonishment of his host and hostess. “Will yez be able to go on the morrow, Abel?”

“Not on your life, Barney Finnegin! Not on your natural life will you ketch me goin’ to New York agin,” excitedly exclaimed the sergeant thumping up and down the room.

“What’s the trouble, Abel,” grinned Barney. “Don’t yez like the ijea?”

“No more Broadway fer me!” declared Abel coming to a halt before the table and shaking his head decidedly. “And that’s settled!”

“Abel Gulick, you talk jest like you

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been to New York and to Broadway, and if the truth were knowed you've never been further from Hoss Hill than to town sence you come home from the War," Eliza replied, staring in astonishment at the sergeant.

"By shote! 'Liza Morgan, the oneriest time I ever had in my hull life were the result of a trip to New York, and you know it, too!"

Barney, who remembered the incident well, enjoyed the agitation of the sergeant and the amazement of the matron to the utmost.

"Go on, Abel, tell 'Liza about it," he said. "She and Ben Losec were to Peapack that winter, and I guess nobody iver told her about it."

"Well, 'Liza, it were in this wise," commenced the sergeant without further urging. "Back in the eighties the guv'ment sent out word that all one-

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

legged and no-legged and one-armed and no-armed veterans livin' near New York as wanted wooden legs or arms should go there with their discharges and git fit out.

"Well, I took an early train and arrived in New York about what we'd call breakfast time—it were in winter, towards the end of winter. Well, I came to New York so ternal early that the guv'ment offices weren't open yet. As I were jest a leetle bit cold-like, I allowed I'd better stop in somewhere. So I goes to a hotel nearby and I says, 'Give me some licker—it's demnition cold outer doors and I want to licker up to keep the icicles off'n my eye-winkers.' "

"A leetle onct in a while in winter keeps you from ketchin' pneumony or brownkeeters," suggested Eliza.

"Yep, that's what I thought. Well,

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the chap behind the counter said,
‘What’ll you have, Jersey Lightnin’?’
and I says, ‘Yep, I come from where
they bile it, how kin you tell?’

“He laughed and I said, ‘Got any
Hank Tagger’s?’ He handed me the
bottle and I poured a pretty stiff horn
of it—it didn’t have jest the right bead
fer Hank’s—but I swallered it and sot
down by the stove to wait for the of-
fices to open. Bimeby I allowed I’d
have another bit and so I took another
snifter and sot by the fire again.
Bimeby, I had several more and then
went up the street to the offices. I sot
on the steps and pretty soon they were
opened up. I went in, showed ‘em my
papers, got my order and were taken
into the room where they had the arms
and legs.

“They got ternal mad because I
thought I knowed better than they did

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

what I wanted, and one feller said to another, 'Don't bother with that hayseed any more. If he knows best let him have his own way.'

"And so they did, 'Liza, they let me have my own way. Pretty soon I were a wobblin' down Broadway towards the ferry, my peg-leg tucked under my arm and my new wooden leg strapped on tight. Why, what's the matter?" asked Abel, turning to Barney who was clinging to his chair convulsed with laughter.

"Sure, don't be afther mindin' me," he sputtered, tears rolling down his ruddy cheeks. "I kin see Abel yit as he walked past me door afther he got to Hoss Hill!" And the jovial inn keeper burst into another roar.

"I ain't got that fur yet, Barney. You jest wait till it's time," said Abel somewhat indignantly. "Well, as I

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was sayin', as I were goin' down Broadway afore turnin' to git to the ferry, the boys along the street were allowin' that I were some big military gun. One hollered, 'See the General from Guv'nor's Island!' Another said, 'I guess he have gout in that left leg of hisn.' And another hollered, 'Hey, Major, you'd better buy a book on walkin', you'll never git back like that.' And so it went all the way to the ferry.

"Then goin' over in the boat I were took seasick, and on the train I were took home-sick and my poor old stump were took sick and when I finally got to Hoss Hill, my pride were took sick-est of all, fer when I got home Ann come out and laughed like she'd bust.

"Then I went in and had a nap and when I come to, there I were—a wooden leg fer the far side strapped

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

on my nigh side stump, and with the britches only down to the j'nt—the pants-leg were always left off that one at the knee to save goods—and what do you think them fellers at the guv'-ment offices put around my wooden leg instead of pants, 'Liza?" queried the hero of the old 14th. New Jersey U. S. V.

"Bless my new patch, Abel, how kin I tell?"

"Why, they jest wrapped a piece of red, white and blue buntin' around that wooden leg of mine from the knee down to the foot till I looked like a ballet girl on a spree."

As the two men laughed Eliza's face took on a pained expression.

"It learned me a good lesson, though," Abel hastily declared, noting Eliza's disapproval, "fer it was the fust and last time I ever got tight."

The Home Rule of Eliza

“I’m awful glad of that, Abel,” Eliza earnestly exclaimed. “There be nothin’ worse in this hull world to make a fool of a man than too much liquor.” Then she turned to Barney and asked, “But what should Abel go to New York fer, anyway?”

Barney became grave. Sitting up he looked from Eliza to Abel.

“ ‘Liza,” he began, “I’ve lived in Hoss Hill fer a good many years now and many a bit of information have I picked up in the course of me business. I’m a man that’s slow to speak, however, and I’m not afther tellin’ iverybody all I know.”

“But something has happened in the past few weeks that makes me unlock the gates of me speech.

“Whin I heard of the way that blackguard Canfield tried to cut the face of the finest lad in yer Home wid

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

his blacksnake, and drove on leavin' him sthandin' there coatless and exposed to the wildness of the storm so that—so that—” He tugged at the collar of his flannel shirt as though it were choking him. “Our little Jerry was took sick and died, I says to meself, says I, ‘Arrah musha, Barney Finnegin, have yez no thought fer the little children in the Home? Go on now, the time has come whin Sam Canfield gits all he is entitled to and as much besides as you kin give him.’

“There ain’t much that I kin be absolutely sure av,” he added hastily as Eliza and Abel leaned forward in tense expectancy, “but I’ve got sstrong suspicions of something that maybe we kin be afther usin’ to lay the Deacon be the heels wid.

“Yez ramimber the railroad accident ferninst the station whin the two

The Home Rule of Eliza

German immigrants were killt! And do yez ramimber what happened to the little curly headed boy that was left an orphan be the same token and whose guarjeen Sam Canfield became shortly afther the wreck?"

"He died from brain fever," Abel volunteered apologetically.

"Brought on be the weltin' and the beltin' your Ann give him," Finnegin exclaimed indignantly. "Yis, and Sam Canfield knew all about it, and why! Well, one day a little while afther Sam had himsif appinted guarjeen, a gentleman av the railroad company stopped at me inn and axed fer a drink and the way to Canfield's place. And this is what he told me he was afther—"

Dropping his voice to a whisper lest some of the children might come in and hear, Barney told Eliza and the ser-

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

geant the stranger's story. The matron's indignation and anger was profound. Abel could only stare in dumb amazement. After a moment of intense silence, Barney arose.

"What come of it all," he said, "I can't be afther sayin' fer I niver heard, but it's in New York yez kin git the information."

"In New York!" almost gasped the matron.

"'Liza Morgan, Jerry McCracken was the finest ladda buck 'twixt here and Heaven. If yez could have listened to him tellin' me what a fine mother yez were to him yez would go to any extreme to git square wid the devil that killt him. And be gorra! if yez don't go to New York fer the evidence, then I'll close up me inn and go mesilf!"

"I'll go, Barney," Eliza replied, her

The Home Rule of Eliza

voice vibrant with determination. "I hain't never been so fur, but I'll go jest the same. Eph Lindsley went last year and he got back here all right."

Abel vigorously nodded assent to her words.

"I wouldn't want you to go alone, Abel," she added, "and as we both can't go, it's left to me I guess."

"That's right, 'Liza," Barney said as he put on his coat and cap. "Yez git the full details from the railroad man what axed me where Sam lived and I do be thinkin' that yez could not only hold yer own job and keep Eph on the committay, but yez might have a club to hold over Sam's head that would keep him very quiet."

Drawing a time-stained card from his old, leather wallet, he handed it to Eliza.

"This is what he left."

Barney Finnegin Makes a Call

Lighting his pipe, Barney went out into the storm and cheerily ploughed his way home.

The elderly couple stepped to the window, adjusted their spectacles and read:

MR. ANDREW BANKS

39 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
ATLANTIC TRANS-STATE R. R. Co.

CHAPTER XIII

'LIZA IN NEW YORK

“**I**T'S a good thing I'm goin' this mornin', Abel. My bunion don't hurt, and that means we be goin' to have fair weather fer a day or two,” Eliza remarked as she stood on the porch and gazed up into the white-flecked blue above her.

For the past week Barney's disclosure had completely possessed the minds of the matron and the sergeant. No one thing had ever before so commanded their attention, but the uncertainty troubled them. So it happened that on this morning Eliza was ready to leave for New York either to confirm the tavern-keeper's suspicions or to prove them groundless.

'Liza in New York

With a last look around, a parting bit of advice to Abel who stood at salute, and a word of admonition to the children, Mrs. Morgan took a firmer grip upon her umbrella and stepped off the porch.

"Good-by! Good-by!" cried the children clustered upon the steps.

"Be keerful, 'Liza," the sergeant called.

Eliza turned partly around, waved them a farewell and went on. As she walked down the path it seemed to her as though even the children's snow-man were watching her departure. She stopped a moment and looked at the frozen effigy uncertain whether his eyes—his whole head—were not turning to give her a "God-speed."

As she neared the gate, a sparrow braver than the rest hopped directly into the path, cocked his head to one

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side, winked several times and in loud, angry tones piped, "Stop! Stop!" When Eliza's skirts were almost brushing the little rascal, he put such energy and volume into his volley of "Stops!" that Mrs. Morgan did stop. At her feet stood Pete, the favorite of her large flock of birds.

To Eliza's excited mind, the daring sentinel seemed to warn her to go no further.

"Why, bless my new patch!" she cried, her face lighting up with relief, "That ain't it at all. He's hungry."

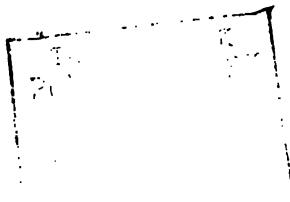
She hurried back to the house.

"I clean forgot to feed them birds," she said to the children who had been watching her. As she threw bits of buckwheat cakes and crumbs and other bird dainties out of the kitchen door, she was almost deafened by the gay chatter of her feathery orphans.



Amid a chorus of good-byes she started again.

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'Liza in New York

Amid another chorus of good-byes, she started again and reached the station without further interruption.

"And return?" the ticket agent suggested when she asked for a ticket.

"Yep," she had replied, but it was not until the first excitement of railroad travel had subsided that she fully realized the import of his words.

"Return?" she said to herself. "What's that young feller think, any way, that I'm leavin' Hoss Hill fer good? Who does he think would plant them flowers on Jerry's grave this spring?"

She moved uneasily in her seat as she imagined the effects of a protracted absence. She thought of Abel hopelessly enmeshed in the spring house-cleaning—if he would attempt it at all. She feared that the children would go unwashed and uncombed

The Home Rule of Eliza

more often than not. She wondered who would mend their clothes and darn their stockings if she should not return. "Bless my new patch!" she exclaimed aloud. "Who'd darn Abel's sock if I wouldn't git back?"

Throughout the entire trip, whether she watched the scenery rushing past the window or pictured in lurid detail an accident to train, or ferry, or on the street, the great question, the predominant thought around which all other thoughts revolved was—WHO WOULD DARN ABEL'S SOCK?

When at last the train pulled in at the terminal, Eliza gazed about her in bewilderment. She asked the way to New York and was told to follow the crowd. She stepped through a pair of iron gates and before she could turn around a hoarse voice shouted "Down!" and the doors clanged be-

'Liza in New York

hind her. It seemed as though, with all those other human beings, she were being dropped into perdition. Scarcely had she framed the thought than they reached the bottom and another voice cried, "Step lively there!" She always did step lively and it nettled her a bit to be told to do so. But she had no time to protest. The crowd behind her jostled and pushed her along. Totally at sea now, she entered a waiting train with the others, the doors rolled shut and with a jerk or two they were off.

Her uneasiness grew with every passing moment. They had already made several stops but she had heard no one call out the ferry. She could contain herself no longer.

"Where be we at?" she asked a gentleman clinging to a strap before her.

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“Guess we’re under the river by this time,” he calmly answered.

“Under the river!” she cried aghast. “I want to go to New York —Heh, mister, stop the car. I ain’t agoin’ to be ketched under the river like a rat in a trap!”

She tried to work her way to the door but before she reached it, the train came to a stop. Willy-nilly she was carried by another struggling mass of humanity onto the platform of the Hudson Terminal. Bewildered, she turned to a guard.

“Where do I git a ferry boat to New York?” she asked.

“Yez are in New York now,” he replied carelessly.

“Bless my new patch! How did I git here?”

“Yez came over be the tube.”

“In the ‘chube’? What be that?”

'Liza in New York

"This is it. Runs from Jersey to New York."

"I never heard tell of a 'chube'—How do you spell it?"

"Ah, gwan. Train fer Jersey City and Hoboken. All aboard! Step lively!"

Eliza climbed up the stairs to the Concourse. Her bump of locality was paralysed. She asked a porter the road to Broadway and was surprised to learn that it was only a block from where she stood. Turning from Cortland Street into the city's great thoroughfare she bumped into the scraggiest looking mortal she had ever seen.

"Jest like Amzi Messler's scarecrow," she thought when they got untangled. Then she looked the man over curiously. "About as leetle as Abner Darby," she mused. "And if

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he ain't got on clothes big enough to fit Eph Lindsley—thin summer ones, too.” When she glanced at his feet, she was thunderstruck, for the toes were out of one shoe and the other foot was wrapped up in a piece of burlap. “Jest like a flaxseed poulster on a horse’s hoof,” she thought. She searched for some time for his hands and finally decided they were hidden in his sleeves.

“Jest look at that,” she exclaimed to a bystander, “if his whiskers don’t look like they be moth et. And his hair ain’t seen a comb nor brush sence afore last huskin’ time!”

The poor fellow tried to shuffle on but the crowd that had gathered as only a New York crowd can, made it impossible. Eliza seemed oblivious to the attention she was attracting. “Look at them two slats a-stickin’ up from

'Liza in New York

his shoulders with a sign nailed fast to 'em—poor man," she exclaimed.

"Eat at Man's Dining Rooms," she read, pointing her umbrella at the advertisement.

The sandwich-man attempted to move on again but the crowd still blocked his way.

"You kin believe me or not," she remarked to her nearest auditor, "but he's the hungriest lookin' critter I ever see. I wonder what famine he be a long-lost relic from."

By this time the mob had become so large and so noisy, that Eliza decided to leave. Before going she handed the object of her pity ten cents.

"Git yourself some corn-beef and cabbage, a pertater and wash it down with a cup of hot tea—middlin' strong—no skim milk." She was about to go when a thought struck her, and

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shaking the umbrella at the man she said sternly, "Don't you git it at Man's if you be a fair specimen of how his victuals take holt."

It took some exertion and a good deal of patience for her to make her way through the throng that had formed from curb to curb, but once clear of the press she walked briskly on. When she reached Nassau Street, however, she realized that she had lost her bearings again. It seemed as impossible for Eliza to keep her sense of direction in the maze of the big city's streets as it would have been for one of the cliff-dwellers along those streets to find his way alone in the woods that covered the Picatinny Mountains. Her wanderings at last lead the matron into the midst of another crowd gathered at the foot of the steps of the Sub Treasury.

'Liza in New York

“Well, if that don’t beat all!” she exclaimed in astonishment as she beheld three superbly gowned women haranguing the multitude. She stopped to listen. “—and women’s suffrage is inevitable. Every woman has a right to vote and we demand it as a right. Votes for women—”

A young banker’s clerk at Eliza’s elbow interrupted the speaker with a taunting remark. But his self-complacent smile suddenly left his face. With a thud the matron’s umbrella descended and smashed his hat over his eyes.

“That’ll learn you to be polite when a lady’s talkin’!”

The clerks and brokers and other Wall Street operators about her yelled with delight. Before she could catch her breath they had hustled her up on the platform. “Speech! Speech!”

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they cried and nothing else would satisfy them. Eliza hesitated until one of the suffragettes asked her to say a word or two to restore order. Straightening her hat and loosening her tippet a bit, she pointed her umbrella at the crowd.

“I’m jest goin’ to say a few words to shet you up so you’ll let these ladies talk—that’s what they’re here fer and I ain’t. But if these women here and any others have the time, and no family duties to hender ‘em, I don’t see why they shouldn’t vote jest like men. Besides,” she continued, pointing at a man who seemed a bit the worse for drink, “if women voted they wouldn’t vote fer the man—or the woman, either—what would give ‘em the most drinks of liquor. No sirree, you couldn’t buy their votes the way Sam Canfield to Hoss Hill does when

'Liza in New York

he wants to git somethin' from them."

"Howsomever," she said, turning to the women, "if you'll come out to Hoss Hill some time, you'll find us women all so busy tendin' to our childern—I got thirteen,—nope, twelve, Jerry died,—and all orphans, too—and so busy tendin' to our house-work that we ain't got no time fer politics."

With a wave of her umbrella, Eliza concluded her remarks with a formula she had once noted in a speech reported in *The Banner*, "Ladies and gents, I thank you."

When she finished, the crowd that had been listening with every manifestation of enjoyment, burst into thunderous applause. Eliza stepped down from the platform and pushed her way out. She hardly knew whether she was walking in the street

The Home Rule of Eliza

or on the sidewalk so excited and confused had she become by the rapid shifting of scenes and events since she had left the Home that morning. The strangeness of it all—the unwonted hurry—the seeming callousness and flippancy of the people surging through the streets or gathering at the slightest provocation in noisy, jeering crowds. She felt as though nothing she did was of her own volition. Aimlessly she drifted along on the steady current flowing past the shops until slowly her composure returned and she remembered the object of her mission. Undoubtedly lack of food—she had eaten nothing since five o'clock—had largely contributed to her momentary depression, but she did not think of that. Now that she found herself on the firm ground of her errand again, she was all eager-

'Liza in New York

ness to find the answer to the question upon whose solution so much depended. It might prove to be her safeguard and that of the orphans—she smiled as she thought of them—against the machinations of the Deacon. So she hurried on.

By dint of repeated inquiries, Eliza at last located the offices of the Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company.

“Why, yes, Mr. Banks works here,” the clerk said with a smile, “but he’s taking lunch now at the Steel and Iron Club across the street.”

Eliza stepped across Broadway and entering the elevator, was shot thirty stories up to the rooms of the club.

“What do you wish?” she was asked at the door.

“I want to see Mr. Banks,” she answered eyeing the flunkey critically. “His vest ain’t hardly big enough to

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cover his shirt-bosom," she said to herself and then, as he turned around to call a higher official, she almost cried aloud, "Bless my new patch! but them be funny tails he's got to his jacket!"

"Your card, please," the second attendant asked.

"You jest tell Mr. Banks a woman what's unbeknownst to him wants to see him—and she can't wait all day either. Her children need her."

"Madam, it is impossible."

"I ain't goin' back without seein' him if I have to wait here the hull afternoon and the childern go hungry. You tell him 'Liza Morgan from Hoss Hill wants to see him about a railroad accident."

That put a different aspect on the matter. Her errand might be one of importance so they told her they would notify Mr. Banks immediately.

'Liza in New York

As the lackey was reporting to a gentleman seated at a nearby table with the president of the road, Mrs. Morgan brushed past the waiter.

"Be you Mr. Banks?" she asked when she reached the table.

"I am, madam. What can I do for you?" he replied in astonishment.

"My name's 'Liza Morgan and I'm from Hoss Hill," she answered. "I come down to find out what you know about Sam Canfield and the boy he were appinted guardeen fer."

Mr. Banks plainly felt annoyed and the president looked bored.

"I am sure, my good lady, I know nothing of Mr. Canfield," was the auditor's brusque reply.

But Eliza was not taken aback.

"In that case I'll tell you my hull story," she continued, "and then you kin git me what I want."

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In spite of Mr. Banks' fervid protestations Eliza rapidly told the story of the railroad accident and Barney Finnegin's suspicions. Then she dilated. She spoke of the Home under Ann Gulick and of her own appointment and love for the children. At last she mentioned Sam Canfield's threat and his treatment of Jerry and what it would mean to the orphans if he were successful in his plans.

The auditor stifled a yawn but the president appeared to be interested.

"We've got boys out there," Eliza concluded, "what if they be well took care of and treated like decent children, may some day be presidents of railroads jest like yourn."

The head of the Atlantic Trans-State Railroad gazed out of the window. His thoughts were carried back almost fifty years. He saw a boy in

'Liza in New York

another orphanage who had endured much as the children had under Ann Gulick. He arose and placed a chair for Mrs. Morgan. "Take a seat, madam, and tell me what you wish," he said.

The auditor was astonished at the tender tone of the president—then he remembered.

Eliza stood her umbrella up against the table, took her woollen tippet off and laid it in her lap beside her gloves.

"Have you had lunch, Mrs. Morgan?" asked the president beckoning to a waiter. "No? Waiter, see what the lady will have."

Eliza's expostulations were in vain—besides, she was hungry.

"Order any thing you like," the president said, passing the menu—he realized his error too late.

With inward misgivings, the ma-

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tron took the card, looked at it for a moment, then she laid it down.

“I kin read plain English,” she said, “but this be sech a jumble, I give it up.” She looked at the card again and added, “*The Banner* kin print better English than that.”

“A special dish, perhaps? Or let me order something for you,” suggested the president kindly.

“No thank you jest the same,” Eliza replied. Then she turned to the waiter. “Bring me a platter of ham and eggs, a pertater, some bread and butter and a cup of hot tea—middlin’ strong—no skim milk.”

While the order was being filled Mrs. Morgan explained exactly what she wanted.

“I kin hold the paper over Sam’s head, I think, and then he can’t hurt Eph nor my childern.”

'Liza in New York

"It is against the rules of the company to give such information," the auditor explained. To the president he said, "I remember something of this. It happened some years ago while I was in the other department."

"Would you see them orphans starved and killed jest because you think a rule of your company can't be broke?" Eliza demanded, her face taking on one of her fighting expressions.

The president smiled but said nothing. He seemed to be enjoying the *rencontre*.

"But it is quite impossible," Mr. Banks replied.

"I hain't goin' to leave this place till you git me that information," Eliza declared with ascerbity. "It ain't nothing dishonest I'm askin', or else I wouldn't be here to New York."

Then the president nodded. Mr.

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Banks shrugged his shoulders and pushed a button. To the messenger that responded, he gave a note addressed to his secretary. In the meanwhile, the waiter had appeared with Eliza's lunch and she did it full justice in the unconventional style in vogue at Horse Hill. When she finished, she opened her purse. "How much do you git?" she asked the waiter.

"That will go on my account," said the president.

"No siree!" the matron declared most emphatically. "Over to Hoss Hill we pay as we go."

The president insisted, but Eliza figured up on her fingers, "Ham and eggs, ten cents; five cents fer the per-tater; five fer bread and butter and five fer tea—twenty-five cents." She laid a quarter on the table.

'Liza in New York

"Thank you, Mrs. Morgan," the president said with a courteous bow.

As he was questioning her about Horse Hill and the Home, the messenger returned with an abstract of the records of the Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company *In Re* Samuel Canfield. The president glanced through the paper, nodded and handed it to Mr. Banks. After he had run his eyes down the type-written lines, he passed the document to Mrs. Morgan.

Eliza scanned it critically and her eyes brightened with satisfaction and expectancy. A burden that she scarcely knew she carried until it was gone, seemed lifted from her heart. She smiled happily at the president and Mr. Banks as she thrust the paper into the bosom of her dress.

"I don't know how to thank you two men enough fer this, but I do know

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you'll never regret it as long as you live. If Sam Canfield don't leave off makin' trouble fer the Home now, I'll be surprised. But then—" her eyes clouded a moment—"Sam's a mighty tough customer and mebbe—mebbe—Why, bless my new patch, there ain't no need of worryin' yet awhile. I'll jest wait till I see Sam myself." Then she laughed aloud, "I bet Abel will feel a heap sprier after he sees this here report." After a moment's thought, she added, "If you ever git to Hoss Hill jest run up and see me. I'll fry you the best mess of ham and *fresh* eggs you ever et."

Eliza pulled on her gloves, fixed herippet about her neck and taking her umbrella arose.

"Come out in the summer time," she said. "Then you kin see the chestnuts and the oaks a-tossin' their tall

'Liza in New York

heads up towards the sky and a-sing-in' their eternal praises. You'll see the wheat and the rye a-noddin' and a-smilin' because they're out in the open air and in the sunshine away from the noisy, dirty city.

"Come out next summer. I'll show you everything we've got. You kin see the krick a-flowin' through the val-ley like a big, windin' band of silver, right past the Home and the weepin' willers by the grave of little Jerry McCracken. You'll see nice white-painted houses and fresh painted red barns. Even our gravel roads be fine and all the fences are in good repair."

As an afterthought she slowly added with a trace of sadness, "There be only two blemishes in all that beautiful landscape—the old Poorhouse that ain't seen no paint in nigh onto thirty years, and your old, ramshackle depot

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that ain't never seen any paint at all." After a short pause, she continued with considerable animation. "If the Lord's willin', me and Abel and the big boys will have the old Home painted nice and white afore summer. And if you hain't got any objections, we'll put what paint we'll have left on your depot as fur as it will go."

Buttoning up her coat, Horse Hill's champion stood ready to leave.

"One moment please," the president exclaimed.

He took a card from his case and wrote a few lines on the back and handed it to the matron. "When the frost is out of the ground," he said, "Horse Hill shall have a new station. Give this card to the foreman and he will take his men up to the Home and paint it any color you wish."

Then Eliza departed for Horse Hill.

CHAPTER XIV

OUT OF THE BACK DOOR

“ ‘**A** BEL GULICK, you jest go up to Sam Canfield’s after you’ve had breakfast and the chores be done and tell him I want to see him this mornin’.” Mrs. Morgan took a sip of coffee, passed the buckwheat cakes to the superintendent and continued: “The sooner this thing is off my mind the better. I didn’t sleep hardly a wink last night what fer thinkin’ over my trip yesterday and a-wonderin’ how I’d break the news to Sam.”

“ ‘Liza Morgan, you ain’t treatin’ me right when you don’t tell me all what you learned yesterday,” Abel complained, spreading some sausage drippings on his cakes. Reaching

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across the table for the syrup, he added, "I never done nothin' to you, have I?"

"Nope, Abel. But it's jest as I told you last night—pass me the cakes fust—I'm afraid if you knowed it all too fur in advance it might leak out—next year we'll make more sassage, this be e'enamost as good as Bill Cole's.—As I was sayin', if it leaked out Sam would git wind of it and git all cocked and primed to beat me."

" 'Tain't right to put me down that way fer a tattler," the sergeant replied, his dignity greatly ruffled. "Another cup of coffee, 'Liza.—Howsom-ever, if you feel that way I hain't a-goin' to argue with you."

"That's right, Abel. I knowed you had sense. Besides, you kin listen whilst I have it out with Sam.—My! I et seven cakes!"

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“I et nine countin’ the sweat-cake—
I guess I’ll let my belt out a hole or
two.”

As soon as breakfast was over and Abel had filled the wood-box, he walked up to Sam Canfield’s farm. After a deal of bluster and expostulation, the Deacon promised to call at the Home. About ten o’clock he walked up to the porch, looked at the mud-scraper and door mat and passed to the rear.

He was thunderstruck to see another scraper and mat there. He gave the door several vicious kicks with the toe of his boot. It opened and disclosed Mrs. Morgan as imperturbable as a statue.

“Confound you, ‘Liza Morgan!’” he shouted, shaking his fist in her face. “You brought me down here to insult me, that’s what you did. But you jest wait till I be the next chairman!”

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“I guess I will,” was the undisturbed reply.

“I’ll bring it up to the next meetin’, that’s what I’ll do!”

“No you won’t, Sam.”

“You won’t hender me, I kin tell you that.”

“Mebbe I kin—comin’ in or goin’ to stay out there all winter?”

“Yes, I’m comin’ in,” Canfield fumed. With a kick of his heel he sent the scraper flying into several pieces. He picked up the mat and flung it far afield. “By Judas! no Poorhouse keeper ever yet kept me out of this hole!” and he stalked in.

“You don’t flustrate me one bit, Sam. Set down.” The matron pointed to a chair.

Canfield looked at the chair and then turned his eyes toward the dining room.

Out of the Back Door

“Jest as cheap to set down as it be to stand up,” Eliza suggested, taking a seat herself.

“I don’t want to set down. I’m here now, what do you want?” he snarled.

“Hello, Sam, did you git here?” Abel cried, coming in on the scene. Silence followed his remark and he volunteered, “I jest met Eph and Barney down the road. Of course, I didn’t tell ‘em what you be here fer.”

“I don’t know either, unless to be made a fool of by her,” he sputtered, jerking his thumb toward the matron. “But by Judas! I’ll show her!” Turning to Eliza, he added, “I’m layin’ my pipes fer you, and I kin jest see me a-settin’ down to that dinin’-room table yender, and when I put the motion fer to take your scalp there won’t be a vote agin me!”

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“Anything else on your mind, Sam,” Eliza blandly asked.

“Yes!” he snapped. “I’ll put this trash into uniforms agin jest like Ann useter have ‘em—prison stripes, that’s what they be, and that’s what they ought to be!” He turned to Abel. “And there’ll be a hoss whip here agin’ too.—Oh, you needn’t look skeered, Abel Gulick. Nobody’s goin’ to tech you.”

Abel was all atremble. “Good Lord!” he groaned, wiping the sweat from his face.

“No use in your groanin’, either,” Sam jeered. “The new Ann won’t be much worse than yourn was—jest a leetle tighter rein on you critters.”

“Let’s git down to business, Sam. This show’s gone fur enough,” Eliza said, motioning to a chair again.

“ ’Liza Morgan, I be a member of

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the Hoss Hill Township Committee and I have the free entry to this here Poorhouse or any part of it. So, madam," he said with a mocking bow, "you kin' talk to me in the dinin'-room; and what's more, as a member of the committee, I order you to come in."

"You're right, Sam. You be a committeeman—yet." Mrs. Morgan got up with alacrity and followed her superior. "Come in too, Abel," she called over her shoulder. "Mebbe you'll be interested."

There was somewhat of a pause after they had seated themselves in the other room. The Deacon glared first at Eliza and then at Abel.

"Sam Canfield," said the matron breaking the silence, "do you remember the railroad accident to the station when the two German immigrants were killed?"

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“Huh, everybody knows that,” was the sneering reply.

“And the leetle orphan that was put in here?”

“I guess we better git her out of here afore spring,” Sam suggested, looking at Abel and tapping his forehead.

Eliza paid no attention to the interruption.

“And you were appinted his guarddeen?” she continued.

Canfield sat up a bit and began twirling his thumbs.

“And the leetle boy died from—well, we’ll say it was brain fever from an accident?” the matron persisted.

Abel began ker-thumping up and down the room, Sam merely twirled his thumbs faster.

“You seem to fergit that,” she said.

“Everyone knows that too,” Canfield exclaimed angrily.

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Abel stopped, looked out of the window and began whistling softly.

“But there’s one thing, Sam, everybody don’t know,” Eliza continued, her face growing stern. Sam looked at her searchingly. Abel stopped whistling and turned. Then she slowly said, “The Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company paid *five thousand dollars* for the death of that boy’s parents.”

Sam’s eyes dropped for just an instant. Abel gave a low whistle and muttered, “By shote!”

“That’s none of my business nor yours either,” said the Deacon.

“Sam Canfield, you know a leetle about law as you know a leetle about everything else. Now as a lawyer, who would a railroad pay sech a sum of money to, eh?”

“If I were a lawyer I’d have the court send you to the lunatic asylum,”

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the committeeman tartly retorted.
“I’m goin’.”

“Jest a minute, Sam.—Generally the
guarddeen gits sech money, don’t he?”
Eliza asked searchingly.

“I don’t know what you’re talkin’
about, so as it’s only a waste of time,
me settin’ here, I’ll say good day.”
And Canfield arose.

“You were the guarddeen of that boy,
Sam Canfield, and you got them five
thousand dollars,” Eliza exclaimed.
“Yes, and you not only kept the money
fer yourself but you put the child in
this here Poorhouse.”

“Nobody ever said the railroad paid
me any sech sum of money, or any
other sum, did they?” said the Dea-
con rather unsteadily, sparring for
time and trying to sound the extent of
the matron’s knowledge.

“I say so!” Eliza calmly replied

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and there was a certain quality to her voice that was unmistakable.

“Then you lie!” the Deacon thundered.

“Sam!” the sergeant admonished.

“See here, Sam,” Eliza replied. “I don’t want to make trouble fer you unless I have to. I know enough about your crooked work in that railroad case to put *you* in stripes if I want to, and mebbe I will, and mebbe I won’t. It all depends on you.”

“You can’t bluff me that way, ‘Liza Morgan,” Canfield blustered. “I don’t know nothin’ what you’re talkin’ about, so you’ll have to excuse me fer the day.” The Deacon started toward the door.

“Jest another minute, Sam,” the matron said quietly, getting up from her chair. “I’ll give you one more chanct to own up. In my pocket I’ve

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got a letter from the railroad company what says that they paid you, as the guardeen of that boy, five thousand dollars and that your receipt fer the money is on file in their offices. Ain't that enough to send you to jail?" Then with her arms akimbo, she demanded, "Now, Mister Deacon Canfield, what do you think about that?"

The Deacon's mouth twitched. Across his face flashed in turn, fear, hate, anger, cupidity. Finally he said slowly as though weighing every word,

" 'Liza Morgan, no one would believe your yarn unless you had the proof. Proof! that's the word, and that's the only thing that goes here this mornin'!" He leaned over and struck the table with his fist. "Where's your proof!"

Eliza took a piece of paper from her pocket and read:

Out of the Back Door

“TO ALL TO WHOM THESE
PRESENTS SHALL COME OR
MAY CONCERN, GREETING:
KNOW YE THAT,

WHEREAS: On the Nineteenth day of April in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and One, Frederick and Elizabeth Werner were killed in a wreck at Horse Hill on a line operated by the Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company;

AND WHEREAS: Samuel Canfield was duly appointed guardian of William Werner, a minor, son of the deceased;

THEREFORE: The said Samuel Canfield, guardian of the said William Werner, a minor, for and in consideration of the sum of FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS, lawful money of the United States, to him in hand paid by the said Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company, has remised, released and forever discharged and by these Presents does for himself, heirs, exec-

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utors and administrators, remise, release and forever discharge the said Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company, its successors and assigns, of and from all manner of action and actions, suits, sums of money, agreements, promises, damages, judgments, claims and demands whatsoever, in law or in equity, which against the said Atlantic Trans-State Railroad Company, the said Samuel Canfield, guardian of the said William Werner, a minor, his heirs, executors, or administrators, ever had, now has or hereafter can, shall or may have, for, upon or by reason of the matter above set forth.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, he has hereunto set his hand and seal the Twenty-Fourth day of June in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and One.

SAMUEL CANFIELD (L. S.)”

“Does that go here this mornin’,
Sam Canfield?” she asked.

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Before she had quite finished her sentence, the Deacon had grasped her wrist with one hand and with the other seized the paper.

“Hold on there, Sam Canfield!” shouted Abel. The veteran stumped across the room, the melodeon bench in his uplifted hand. The old soldier’s spirit—subdued these many years under the lash of his departed spouse’s tongue—reasserted itself at last. The fire that shone from the eyes of the hero of Five Forks was a revelation to Eliza and to Canfield.

The Deacon relaxed his grip. Eliza was undaunted by the onslaught, and her eyes were bright with a new light as she thought of Abel’s precipitate leap to her defence. “If you ask me polite-like, Sam,” she said ironically, “you kin have this paper. It ain’t nothin’ to me, fer it’s only a copy I

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made." With a note of triumph in her voice she continued, "I kind of thought you would try some sech caper, so I looked out fer you. I got the original upstairs."

"Let me see it," demanded the Deacon.

As he read the copy Mrs. Morgan gave him, he turned ghastly white. His thin lips seemed bloodless. He hesitated.

"Supposin' this be true and I did git the money, what be your terms?" he asked.

"Now you're talkin' sense, Sam," Abel interjected as he seated himself in the middle of the room on his erstwhile weapon.

"My terms?—I hain't got any," Eliza slowly declared.

Canfield's fingers twitched nervously. He feared he had played his game beyond the limit.

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“The terms of my orphans, though,” continued the matron, “be that you write out your resignation from the Hoss Hill Township Committee and a promise never again to interfere with the runnin’ of this Home. And that you do it this minute, too!”

In all his sixty years Samuel Canfield had never been known to surrender to man or beast, as many a Horse Hiller and many a spirited colt had learned to their sorrow. His position as the iron-handed, inexorable boss of the township was the mainspring of his life. A crabbed, sour satisfaction it was, but it fed full his acrimonious nature. And now to lose his place on the committee and by the hand of the matron of the Poorhouse choked him with anger.

“And if I don’t,” he sputtered.

“If you don’t resign in five minutes,

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your last chanct be gone. I've got lots of work to-day." Eliza looked at the old clock on the mantel. "By the time the twelve o'clock whistle to the saw-mill blows Eph Lindsley will have the original in his possession."

"I've got a good notion to fight you yet," Canfield said stubbornly.

"Then there be no more use talkin' —you wear the stripes this spring and not the orphans," and Eliza turned as if to go.

"I'll give you a thousand cash and Abel five hundred if you'll both shet up," Canfield cried.

Eliza stopped, her lips tightened, but she did not reply. Abel sat up with a jerk, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"I'll double it!"

Not a sound in the room but the tick-ing of the clock.

Out of the Back Door

The Deacon grew desperate. He moistened his lips.

“I’ll give you and Abel the five thousand to divide between you.”

“Durn your measly hide, Sam Canfield,” Abel shouted, springing up and shaking his fist at the Deacon. “There ain’t enough money in all Hoss Hill Township to buy me and Liza!”

“You’re right, Abel,” the matron said. “Sam, you resign now or never. Which be it?”

“I’ll resign, but by Judas I’ll git even with you for this trick,” the Deacon cried as he stamped about the room in a paroxysm of rage.

“Then set down here to the table and write it out—there be pen, ink and paper all ready fer you. As fer gittin’ even, I reckon you’ll do nothin’ of the kind.”

The Home Rule of Eliza

“Mebbe we be breakin’ the law by not handin’ you over to the sheriff,” Eliza remarked as she received the resignation. “Howsomever, I ain’t lookin’ fer more trouble than comes my way, but bless my new patch, when it do come I hain’t a-goin’ to duck.”

Canfield did not stop to listen. He went to the front door. It was locked and the key gone. He turned to the matron as for an explanation. She was ready.

“Sam Canfield,” she began, “you no longer be a member of the Hoss Hill Township Committee and ain’t got nothin’ to say here. I am the boss jest now, and I order you out of this Home jest as quick as you kin trot.” And she pointed to the back door.

“I’m goin’ out this way if I have to bust the door down to do it,” he sullenly persisted.

Out of the Back Door

“Sam, do you remember what I told you to the meetin’ that afternoon when I were appointed matron? Mebbe you fergit, so I’ll jest remind you. Out there be a mud-scraper and a door-mat. As your boots don’t appear to be muddy, you don’t need the scraper; and as your heart and soul kin never be wiped clean, you ain’t got no use fer the mat. There’s your door.”

Deacon Canfield, with head erect, strode out by way of the kitchen. The matron and the superintendent watched him stalk down the path and into the road. When he had disappeared, Eliza slowly turned and wistfully inquired, “Abel, would you have dared to hit Sam?”

The old warrior rose to his full height, with eye flashing.

“ ‘Liza,” he exclaimed, “if Sam Can-

The Home Rule of Eliza

field hadn't let go when I hollered,
'Hold on there, Sam,' . . . broke his
skull with that melodeon bench jest as
sure as you're a foot high."

"Abel—you're a brave—man," the
widow murmured, looking up proudly
into the determined face.

A smile overspread the sergeant's
countenance, and with eyes beaming
happiness, he executed the most fetch-
ing salute of his career.

CHAPTER XV

THE COURTSHIP OF ABEL GULICK

FEBRUARY had passed peacefully in the routine work at the Home. March was almost spent but the glow of the kitchen fire was still needed to temper the chill air after sundown. The day's work was done and every pot and pan shone brightly in the yellow light of the evening lamp. Eliza sighed contentedly. The children were in bed, their mischievous hands quiet in sleep. With her bowed spectacles half way down the bridge of her nose, she sat by the fire knitting a bright red stocking. Abel stood over the stove pensively peeling apples with his jack-knife. From time to time he dropped the peelings on the hot lids

The Home Rule of Eliza

and the agreeable odor of the burning skins filled the room. Eliza inhaled the grateful aroma with evident enjoyment, and her flying needles lagged a trifle. Abel peeled, sliced and ate apple after apple. Peeling after peeling fell upon the stove in eccentric profusion. Eliza glanced up from her knitting and noted that the sergeant seemed pre-occupied and somewhat ill at ease. But she said nothing, and bent over her work again. The pyramid of peels assumed alarming proportions.

“Bless my new patch, Abel,” the matron exclaimed, dropping the stocking into her lap, “but if you git a leetle more on that heap of peelin’s and cinders, you’ll have to git out your snow shovel agin. You must have e’na-most a scuttle full on that stove already, hain’t you?”

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

“By shote, ‘Liza, I were thinkin’ so much on a certain subject that I clean et up seven of ‘em!’ cried the sergeant, wiping his knife on the lining of his coat-tail.

“It must be a very momentaceous subject, Abel. Them apples be pip-pins, and they don’t run leetle, either,” answered the widow, taking up her work.

“It were, ‘Liza,—er—how long be it sence Dave’s dead?” asked Abel as he snapped his knife shut and put it into his pocket.

“Nigh onto seven months. It was airly in September that he died.” There was a slight tremor in the matron’s voice.

“By shote, so it were. I was figurin’ on its bein’ jest six months ago.”

“Why, Abel, what is that to worry

The Home Rule of Eliza

you?" Eliza asked in surprise.

"Well—er—you see—" The sergeant took a step nearer. "It ain't—er—it ain't allowed to be jest right fer—fer to be talkin' about certain things afore at least six months are up, be it?"

"What under the sun be you drivin' at?" Eliza ceased her knitting and looked Abel squarely in the face.

"Why, you know it—it—it ain't considered respectable-like afore six months, be it?" stammered the confused sergeant.

"Be what, Abel? Your pint ain't very clear. I do believe them apples is gone clean to your head."

"No, they hain't, but I guess I'd better let this belt out a hole or two."

"Now, Abel, do talk sense. What be you tryin' to git at?"

"Well, 'Liza Gu— Morgan, as it's

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

over six months sence Dave died, there be no Hoss Hiller to my way of thinkin', who'd allow it was too early fer—fer me and you to— Say, 'Liza Gulick, how'd you like to be 'Liza Gulick?'" eagerly shouted the perspiring sergeant, drawing another step nearer.

"It appears you have me that way already," Mrs. Morgan dryly retorted.

"What do you mean, 'Liza?'" Abel queried anxiously.

"Never mind, Abel. Jest the same I be 'Liza Morgan yet."

"Of course you be, and that be jest what's sort of worryin' me like," said Abel in hopeless confusion as he mopped his brow with his red bandanna handkerchief.

"Well, Abel, I don't see why you be worryin' because I be 'Liza Morgan yet," the matron smiled encouragingly.

The Home Rule of Eliza

"I do, 'Liza, I've been thinkin' all winter that as soon as them six months were up no one'd be scandalized if we were to—to— Why, 'Liza Morgan, fer me and you to git spliced," blurted the sergeant, at his wits' end.

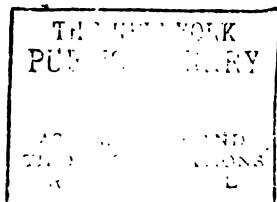
"Why, Abel Gulick! How kin you?"

"How kin I? How kin I? 'Liza Gulick, don't you know that where a fair widder like you be at stake, don't you know that an old soldier like I be kin face fire and shrapnel and never flinch? Why, ever sence the mornin' you handed me the rubber-plant, the time you fust come to the Home, 'Liza, I been thinkin' how handy it would be when Dave'd be dead fer me and you to git married." Abel sighed tenderly. "Jest say yes, 'Liza," he pleaded. "There ain't nothin' in all Hoss Hill—nor to town neither—that



Pitched headlong into the lap of the widow.

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The Courtship of Abel Gulick

could make me so joyful. 'Liza—'" and the ardent wooer, attempting to kneel at his inamorata's feet, forgot that he had no hinge in his peg-leg and pitched headlong into the lap of the astonished and blushing widow.

"How kin you dare to take sech liberties with me, Abel Gulick, as to fall right into my lap!" exclaimed the matron. But as she chided the fallen sergeant, the thrice widowed 'Liza patted his bald head with one hand and with the half-knitted stocking in the other, wiped an embryonic tear from her eye.

"Fergive me, 'Liza," groaned the mortified warrior from the deep folds of the widow's lap. "I clean forgot that my peg-leg hain't got no jint!"

"Be you hurt, Abel?" Eliza asked sympathetically as she helped the superintendent to his feet.

The Home Rule of Eliza

“No, ‘Liza—only it were so sudden.”

“Indeed it were. You kind of flustered me with your sudden onset,” the widow remarked.

“ ‘Liza,’ he cried, leaning forward and gazing down into her face, “Ann drove me with a club, but you’re different. All you got to do is jest to give one cluck and say ‘giddap’ and I’ll run all over Hoss Hill fer you.”

“Set down there now, Abel, and pay attention to me fer a minute,” commanded the matron. “That’s it. Now afore you do any more of them rash stunts jest listen. You know I be a good Christian woman what believes in a Hereafter. I got three veterans a-waitin’ fer me on the shinin’ shore already, and I be in mortal fear all the time if I should die there would be trouble over there. I kin jest imagine me a-comin’ up to them jasper

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

gates and them three veterans a-spy-in' me and a-chargin' down the line past the elected ones fer to see who could git me fust. As I never cared fer onnecessary trouble, I always allowed that the fust one to git to me would jest have to fight them other two and settle it that way. Abel, if you were to marry me, there'd be four of you. Just think of it—four soldiers a-dashin' down the golden street and —and—Abel, that would be a very compromisin' scene and I'd be e'en-a-most ashamed fer the onlookers, I'd be so scandalized."

" 'Liza, have you clean fergot that there be no takin' and givin' in marriage over yender?'" replied the sergeant earnestly.

"Now that you speak of it, it appears to me the Good Book do say somethin' like that."

The Home Rule of Eliza

“In course it do. Shall I git the
verse?” Abel started for his room.

“Well, no, never mind. As long as
you be sure, I’ll take your word fer it,
Abel.”

“Fer when shall the day be sot,
‘Liza?” asked Abel, taking the ma-
tron’s hands in his.

“I guess we’d better do it pretty
soon, fer it ain’t jest proper-like fer
me and you to abide under the same
roof too long this way. Some of them
Hoss Hill tongues will begin waggin’
and I’ve always been very techy on
them pints.”

“When shall it be then?” cried Abel,
his every feature beaming.

For almost an hour the old couple
discussed the question of their wed-
ding day. For Abel, the next day
would have been none too soon, but
Eliza, after the manner of women, de-

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

manded more time. Reluctantly she consented to set the nuptials for the Thursday of the following week.

“Well, that be settled then,” she exclaimed. After a pause she held up the unfinished stocking and said with a smile, “Do you think the foot will fit you, Abel?”

“Me!” he exclaimed in surprise.

“Yep, you,” Eliza laughed happily.

“I dunno. Lemme see.” Pulling off his boot, Abel compared the foot of the stocking with his own. “I guess it be jest my size.”

“Well then, as it be the fust one of the pair and the leg be only about half done, I guess I’ll put a yaller band on it now fer a sock fer you instead of makin’ a stockin’ out of it fer myself,” the matron explained.

“Why, ‘Liza, how thoughtful you be. Ann useter make me wear her old ones.

The Home Rule of Eliza

She always allowed one pair'd go twice as fur with me as with other folks. And besides, they was always too big."

"Well, you won't have to wear no second-hand sock now any more, that's certain."

Silence fell upon the two old people as they sat before the kitchen fire. Eliza, her hands folded in her lap and her spectacles perched upon the top of her head, watched the steam lazily rolling out of the spout of the kettle at the back of the stove. Abel, with his chin resting in the palm of his hand, gazed through the open slide in the front of the stove into the glowing coals. What they were thinking of it was impossible to say, but the changing expressions flitting across their faces showed that their thoughts were pleasant, though touched at times with a

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

hint of sadness—no doubt the remembrance of the bitter that had been mixed with the sweet of their lives.

Suddenly Eliza aroused herself from her reverie.

“Abel,” she said, “I was thinkin’ as I was settin’ here that you been wearin’ that uniform of yourn fer some years now. As our weddin’—” She stopped to smile proudly at the sergeant who had turned to listen. “As our weddin’ be next Thursday, what’s to hender you from gittin’ a new one?”

“I guess there be nothin’ to hender me, ‘Liza,” replied Abel. “This one do be a leetle worn-like. I ought to git a new one, anyway, to celebrate the occasion.”

“Then you run down to town and git fitted. Whilst you’re gone, I’ll bring out that alpaca dress of mine what I

The Home Rule of Eliza

wore when me and Bill Cole—yep it were Bill—were married and fix it up a bit. It don't hardly look as if it were ever wore at all."

"It won't take 'em long to fit me out. I'll go to town in a day or two."

"Why don't you go down to-morrow?" the matron suggested. "Abner Darby said he's goin' to take a load of calves to town in the mornin' and mebbe you kin ketch a ride. There's always room fer one more. And be careful and git somethin' that won't fade or shrink—blue's a mighty delicate color sometimes. It always pays in the long run to git clothes that are made of good stuff—particularly woollens and flannels.—Bless my new patch! if that ain't nine o'clock," she exclaimed as the ancient time-piece struck the hour. "It's time we old folks was in our beds."

The Courtship of Abel Gulick

Abel got up and raised a lid of the stove.

“The fire’s all right,” he said. Picking up a candle he went upstairs.

“I hope they don’t try and have a skimmerton Thursday,” Eliza called after him.

Abel only chuckled.

CHAPTER XVI

A HORSE HILL WEDDING

AT the March inspection of the Home, in the early part of the engagement week, Chairman Lindsley arose just before the adjournment of the meeting. He moistened his throat with the remains of the lemonade, and brushed a crumb or two from his vest.

“ ‘Liza Morgan and Abel Gulick,’ ” he said “it be with the greatest pleasure and delight that we, the Hoss Hill Township Committee, extend to you our heartiest congratulations and best wishes on the step you both have took. If you want to hold your weddin’ in this here buildin’, you’re welcome to it, and you have the consent of the committee.”

A Horse Hill Wedding

“Thank you, Eph,” replied the sergeant, executing one of his most polished salutes.

“Thank you, Mister Chairman and gentlemen, fer the kind words you have spoke jest now,” said Eliza, rising as she adjusted her patch and smoothed out her stiffly starched apron. “But me and Abel allowed t’other night as how we’d jest go up to the parsonage next Thursday night and git married quiet-like, bein’ as it ain’t so very long sence both of us were left in blessed singleness. Besides, we be e’enamost too old fer any sort of a weddin’ party. And furthermore, if we’d have one mebbe the boys to the village would bring us a skimmerton and that’d raise too much of a racket and make us feel flat-like. Leastwise it would me.” With a slight courtesy she sat down.

The Home Rule of Eliza

Amzi Messler slowly rose to his feet.
“ ‘Liza Morgan,’ he said, “last night as we were a-settin’ around the stove up to Hi Pierson’s store and a-talkin’ things over, it was allowed, when we got to the subject of you and Abel, that if you weren’t goin’ to have the hull village to the weddin’, why, you could ask the Township Committee to come anyway, bein’s both you and Abel be public officials. Besides, you’ll have to have witnesses. I fer one, and I guess these gentlemen here’ll all agree with me, think it will lend honor and credit to the Hoss Hill Home.”

“You needn’t make no kind of a spread, ‘Liza. Jest a leetle somethin’ like this will do,” suggested Hi Pierson, indicating the lemonade pitcher and jumble dish with his thumb.

“ ‘Liza Morgan, you’ve got to do it,

A Horse Hill Wedding

that's all there be to it. You can't git away from it no how. Kin she, Abel?" remarked the secretary, emphasizing each word with a vigorous downward sweep of his arm.

"Well, sence I sot here and heard all the nice things you people been sayin', I'm willin' fer one to have a weddin' party," replied Abel, moving the tip of his peg-leg about on the floor as though delineating some fanciful character on the ingrain carpet, and at the same time casting furtive glances at the matron.

"It will never do, fer as I said afore—" but Mrs. Morgan's expostulations were cut short.

"All them what be in favor of 'Liza Morgan and Abel Gulick holdin' their weddin' in this here Home and invitin' the Township Committee and their wives will please signify by sayin'

The Home Rule of Eliza

‘Aye,’ ” said Eph, rising quickly. “The ‘Ayes’ have it,” he declared, giving the table a resounding whack with his corn-cob pipe.

“ ‘Liza Morgan and Abel Gulick,’ ” he continued, “this here committee unanimously votes fer you to holt your weddin’ here next Thursday night, rain or shine. We’ll all be present as representatives of the township you have both served so faithfully and well sence the fust of July last. This meetin’ be adjourned.”

“How about bringin’ your own wife, Eph?” asked one of the members as the committee passed down the walk.

“All right, I’ll bring my fiddle,” laughed the old bachelor, “and, say, boys, let’s ask Barney to come up with us. He’s jest as much interested in runnin’ the Home right as some of us be.”

A Horse Hill Wedding

“There, Abel, they went and done it. They went and done it,” declared the matron, pacing up and down the dining-room floor, as the sergeant entered the house after seeing the committee off.

“Went and done what, ‘Liza? You’re frustrated-like, and I don’t know what you’re drivin’ at.”

“That committee done it. If we have a weddin’ party here, there’ll be a skimmerton sure and as we be sech an old couple, what’ll the people think of us? The hull thing will be put in *The Banner*—skimmerton and all!”

“Supposin’ there be a skimmerton and supposin’ it be put in *The Banner*, that won’t kill us. Besides, mebbe the boys will fergit the night,” reassuringly suggested the sergeant, himself thoroughly pleased with the outcome of the meeting.

The Home Rule of Eliza

“Fergit the night—never! That Eph Lindsley run that motion of hisn through so quick that it jest took my breath away fer a minute—jest when I needed it more’n I ever diu in my hull life afore.”

“Don’t worry about it, ‘Liza. It were a mighty fine compliment to me, and to you, too.”

“I suppose they did mean it fer a compliment. But if Eph Lindsley hadn’t done it so swift I’d a objected all right.—Bless my new patch, Abel, be that the six o’clock whistle to the saw-mill!”

“I guess it be.”

“And that table ain’t sot fer supper yet? Jest call them children in out of the yard right away. They got to git washed and fixed up and help git things ready. I’ll put the water on fer the drawin’ of the tea awhile.”

A Horse Hill Wedding

Here and there in the village the gleam of swinging lanterns pierced the darkness. A common purpose seemed to move them all, for one after another they fell into a line of unsteady points of light moving along the road. As the first one reached the Home, the clock on the old First Church struck the hour of eight. Then the latch of the gate clicked, and the gravel in the walk crunched under many feet. Tramping up the steps, the visitors extinguished their lanterns and set them in a row against the house.

“What be you doin’ with yourn, Hi?” asked a voice.

“Thought I’d hang it up here so anybody goin’ by kin tell there’s someone to home,” laughed Pierson as he hooked the handle of his lantern over a nail driven in the cornice of the porch between two pillars.

The Home Rule of Eliza

As they turned, the door opened and Eliza, gowned in her renovated alpaca dress, a little black lace adorning her head, greeted them.

“Howdy do, folks,” she cried; “I’m glad you all got here. Come in and take off your wraps.”

Through the doorway filed the members of the township committee and their wives. Barney Finnegin and Eph Lindsley, his cherished violin under his arm in lieu of a spouse, brought up the rear.

“Well, ‘Liza,” said Barney as he stepped into the hall, “I’m glad yez are not afther attackin’ me wid that broom av yours this night. Begorra, I need all me wind to jine in whin they start singin’, ‘Here Comes the Bride’!” The jocund inn-keeper laughed heartily at his bit of pleasantry and began singing the air.

A Horse Hill Wedding

Abner Darby nudged him with his elbow.

“Sh!” he said, “Here comes the dominie.”

“Abel,” said the matron when they were all gathered in the dining-room, “you’d better git another chair from the kitchen else somebody’ll have to stand.—It’s a good thing I give the children an early supper and sent them upstairs or there wouldn’t be no room here at all.”

“I guess I’ll take them up some weddin’ cake so they kin dream on it to-night,” smiled Lindsley.

“No you don’t, Eph Lindsley,” replied Eliza. “They’d eat it and then they’d git indyspepsy.—Land sakes! here comes the skimmerton!” The matron rushed to a window and peered anxiously into the darkness, but the noise that had startled her had ceased.

The Home Rule of Eliza

“Guess I’m kind of nervous to-night, but that sounded jest like a tin pan a-bangin’ to me.”

“Never mind the skimmerton, ‘Liza,” called Darby from the side-board at the end of the room where he was helping himself to jumbles and cakes. “There ain’t goin’ to be any —leastwise I ain’t heard about it. Anyway, the dominie here seems to be gittin’ oneasy about somethin’, so you and Abel step out and git tied up. I want some of that weddin’ cake Eph was talkin’ about.”

The self-confident bride and the self-conscious groom took their places in the center of the room. The officiating divine began the rites and soon the benediction was pronounced. Scarcely waiting for the last word to be spoken, the guests overwhelmed the happy couple with their congratulations.

A Horse Hill Wedding

When the excitement had somewhat subsided, the clergyman excused himself.

“I have a sick parishioner, Mrs. Gu-luck,” he said, donning his hat and coat, “who is in urgent need of my presence.” As he stepped upon the dimly lighted porch, he was met by Abel.

“Jest hold on a minute, dominie,” the sergeant exclaimed. “I’ve got somethin’ in my pocket fer you.”

Abel inserted his hand into one of his waistcoat pockets but did not find what he was in search of. He tried the other with equally poor results. Thrusting his hand deep into his trousers’ pocket, he fetched up a jack-knife.

“That ain’t it,” he smilingly said.

Then he explored his other trousers’ pocket and with an exclamation of dis-

The Home Rule of Eliza

gust withdrew nothing but two brass buttons for his uniform.

“I’ve got it somewhere, fer I put it in one of them pockets jest afore I come downstairs.—Here, what’s this?” he cried, bringing to light a fair sized piece of plug from a tail-pocket. “By shote, Dominie, I don’t want to keep you all night, but that’s in one of my pockets, sure.” As he spoke, he extracted a small package from the other tail of his coat.

“I guess this be it. Wait till we git a better light on it. Nope, it be my new jew’s-harp wrapped up yet. Well, I’ll—”

“Never mind searching further to-night, Brother Gulick,” suggested the clergyman mildly.

“Here you be. This be it, I guess,” confidently exclaimed the perspiring Abel as he opened many layers of pa-

A Horse Hill Wedding

per only to find a packet of seed corn.
“Consarn it all!”

“Tut! Tut! Brother Gulick. Patience, my friend, patience,” admonished the minister, endeavoring at the same time to get sufficient light on his watch to see the hour.

“By shote, Dominie, I put eleven dollars in a paper fer you early this evenin’.”

“‘Seek and ye shall find,’ Brother Gulick. ‘Seek and ye shall find.’”

“Well, if your sick man kin wait till I hunt through my pockets agin—”

“‘The Lord loveth a cheerful giver,’ Brother Gulick.”

“Well, you see, I played Eph Lindsay’s hoss to the fair last fall and I cleaned up eleven dollars on him; so I jest sot it aside fer an occasion like this. Had it in a drawer with some other parcels.”

The Home Rule of Eliza

“Brother Gulick, did you come into possession of that money at the betting ring?” asked the clergyman, his tone of voice indicating both horror and chagrin.

“You bet I did!” answered the sergeant proudly.

“Then I am afraid the money is tainted,” sadly remarked the good man.

“Oh, I dunno. It’s only tainted when the other fellow’s got it and you can’t tech it.”

“We cannot argue the question here to-night, Brother Gulick. It is getting—”

“By shote, Dominie, here’s your tainted wad all right. Jest as I wrapped it up in a piece of *The Banner*. Yep, that’s it. I knowed I’d find it. Take it,” said the sergeant, handing the package to the minister.

A Horse Hill Wedding

“I fear that the taint upon this will never wear away,” said the clergyman as he took it somewhat reluctantly.

However, he thrust the money into his pocket and looked at his watch.

“Gracious me! that poor, dying mortal! I shall pray for light and guidance in this matter, Brother Gulick,” and tapping the pocket containing the honorarium, he hastened away on his mission of grace.

“Why, where have you been all this time, Abel Gulick?” cried his bride as the sergeant returned, blinking, to the dining-room.

“I was out on the porch with the dominie.”

“Well, the idee! Here we’ve been blamin’ ourselves fer lettin’ that poor man go away in sech a hurry that we clean fergot to ask him to have some

The Home Rule of Eliza

supper afore he went. And there you were, e'enamost a hull half hour a-keepin' him from his holy callin'. What were you doin' out there, gittin' religion?"

"Nope, it weren't religion exactly we were talkin' about," replied Abel.

"Out with it. What were it?" commanded Eliza.

Abel explained.

"If that's what kept you, I guess we kin fergive you then. I—" Eliza threw up her head. "Did you hear that noise jest then?" she cried.

"It's the skimmerton sure! Lock the doors!" Darby exclaimed, winking at Amzi Messler.

The matron stood undecided whether to go to the window again or not. She listened intently for a moment but the sound was not repeated. She sighed with relief.

A Horse Hill Wedding

“If that don’t beat all! I thought sure it were the boys a-comin’.”

After a pause she drew a small package wrapped in newspaper from the pocket of her dress and continued, “As I were comin’ downstairs from dressin’ I found this here on the landin’.” She handed the parcel to Abel.

“Well if it ain’t that fifteen dollars!” cried the bewildered sergeant.

“Why, Abel Gulick, what did you give that poor minister then?” asked the matron.

“B—by shote, ‘Liza,” he stammered. “I guess it were the rest of your hair what I found in the woodbox when I sent that sample afore Christmas to match your wig.”

“If that ain’t the worst ever! I kin jest see that surprised dominie openin’ that parcel after prayin’ fer light and guidance over it,” cried Mrs. Gu-

The Home Rule of Eliza

lick. And she joined in the laughter that followed her remark.

“The fust thing you do, Abel,” she went on when the hilarity had subsided, “is to go up to the parsonage to-morrow mornin’ and swap parcels with the dominie.” Turning to her guests she said, “I guess you all be ready fer a bite to eat by now. There—”

“One minute, ‘Liza,” interrupted the chairman of the township committee. “I brought my fiddle along and afore we set down to eat, we’ll jest have one good, old-fashioned Virginny reel.”

While Ephraim tuned up his instrument, the company took their places with the bride and groom at the head of the line.

“Git ready!” called the musician. Barney Finnegin stood to one side

A Horse Hill Wedding

calling off the numbers. Clapping his hands and keeping time with his foot, he sent the smiling pair through the evolutions of the reel. Amid the general stamping of feet and the shouts of the guests, they swung to the foot of the line. Couple after couple followed until the dance was done.

“All keep your places!” Abner Darby shouted. “It ain’t fair fer Eph and Barney Finnegin not to have a dance too. Eph, jest put your fiddle down and take ‘Liza fer a partner. And Abel, you git out your jew’s-harp and play that tune agin whilst Barney takes Hi Pierson’s wife. Hi, you kin call off.” With Abel supplying the music and Hiram Pierson calling the numbers, the reel was once more danced.

In simple, unrestrained merriment the evening quickly passed. It was

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not until nearly midnight that the guests prepared to leave.

“Abel,” said Eliza, “Hi Pierson’s lantern is burned out. Git yourn and see ‘em home.”

“I guess I left it out to the cow shed,” remarked Abel to his wife. “I’ll go and see.”

Hardly had the kitchen door closed behind the sergeant than a tremendous uproar rent the stillness of the night. *Crash! rattle! bang!* Not a soul stirred. They were startled into immovability. Then Eliza aroused herself.

“It’s come!” she called, rushing into the kitchen. “Here comes the skimmerton and it’ll be put in *The Banner!*”

Suddenly the voice of Abel was heard above the turmoil. “Whoa! Consarn ye! Gee! Whoa!”

As the matron, lamp in hand and

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followed by the entire party, ran out into the yard, she saw the sergeant frantically trying to remove a milk pail that was fastened between the horns of the cow.

“Bless my new patch! Abel Gulick, what be the meanin’ of this, anyway?” gasped the matron in astonishment, but nevertheless greatly relieved.

“I guess I left the milk pail standin’ here this afternoon and she hooked it up onto her horns.”

“If I didn’t think it were the skim-merton! But it ain’t and as the cow and you won’t git in *The Banner* I won’t say nothin’.”

The pail was removed from its unaccustomed position and all filed back into the house.

After many hearty good-nights, the party dispersed. Abel, lantern in hand, escorted the Piersons to their

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home. The last one to leave was Ephraim Lindsley.

“ ‘Liza,’ ” he remarked as he took the matron’s hand to say good-night, “that were the first Virginny reel I’ve danced sence the huskin’ bee to fath’er’s big barn.”

“That were jest afore you went West, weren’t it, Eph?” observed Mrs. Gulick slowly.

“Yes, it were, ‘Liza,” softly replied Ephraim, gazing over toward his well-built house and well-filled barns.

“It’s a good spell ago, ain’t it?” meditatively remarked Eliza.

“It’s a good spell ago,” repeated Lindsley retrospectively. “And when one of the four soldier boys in his new uniform come back to Hoss Hill on furlough, jest then there were no room fer me here and I—went—West.—Good-bye, ‘Liza, and God bless you.”

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“Good-night, Eph.”

Eliza Gulick stood alone on the porch of the old Horse Hill Poorhouse, looking toward the village. A glimmering light appeared out of the darkness. It came slowly dancing down the hill and over the bridge. It drew nearer and nearer and then stopped at the gate.

“It’s Abel!”

THE END

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